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Central Asia and Tibet

VOL. II.

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by

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Author of [illegible]

With 150 Illustrations from Drawings and Photographs
Eight Full-page Coloured Illustrations from Pictures
and Five Maps, mostly by the Author

VOL. II.

LONDON
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1903

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CENTRAL ASIA AND TIBET

Towards the Holy City of Lassa

BY

SVEN HEDIN

Author of "Through Asia," etc.

With 420 Illustrations from Drawings and Photographs,
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MAP.

Map of Central Tibet . . . . . *at end of Vol.*

KEY TO THE TRANSLITERATION OF THE MAP-NAMES.

å on the map is rendered by o in the text.

ch	„	„	„	kh	„
dj	„	„	„	j	„
e (final)	„	„		eh	„
g (final)	„	(sometimes)		gh	„ (e.g tagh)
gi	„	„	rendered	ghi	„
j	„	„	„	y or i	„
s	„	„	(generally)	z	„
sch	„	„	rendered	sh	„
tj	„	„	„	ch (as in "church")	
tsch	„	„	„	tch or ch	

VI.

Across the Desert of Gobi.

Mountain Defiles and a Waterless Desert.

CHAPTER I.

A TRIP TO THE AYAG-KUM-KÖLL.

As soon as I was settled down in my yurt beside the springs of Temirlik, my day was spent in the following manner: After a good sleep and breakfast, I spent several hours making clean copies of my scientific observations and journals, so that I might have a double set to send home. I also wrote letters to friends in Europe, and then sat down beside the fire to read my Swedish newspapers, using a sort of home-made arm-chair which Islam had contrived for me. When it got dark, I had a fire lighted in the cave, and developed photographic plates until a late hour of the evening, and finally, when this was finished, went back to the yurt and had my dinner, or supper, whichever you please to call it.

I paid the men their wages for the time I had been absent, and bought four more excellent camels, thus increasing the number to fourteen. I dismissed Musa of Osh and young Kader, both of whom were very anxious to return home. To the former I entrusted my big budget of letters for posting in Kashgar. Several of these were of great importance. We had been through what remained of my money, and found it was not enough. I wrote therefore to my father and to the Swedish Ambassador at St. Petersburg, Count Gyldenstolpe, begging them to send a considerable sum in Russian bank-notes to Consul-General Petrovsky, who would change them into Chinese silver money, and send it on to me at Charkhlik by the following summer. I also wrote to Colonel Saitseff at Osh, asking him to send me a fresh supply of preserved foods.

Between the 25th of October and the 4th of November, the Cossacks, accompanied by Tokta Ahun, Mollah, and Togdasin Beg, made a hunting excursion to Kum-köll. As I

should have no opportunity myself to cross over the Chimen-tagh and Kalta-alagan in that direction, I commissioned Shagdur to draw me a sketch map of the route they took, to make meteorological observations throughout the trip, and—what I was chiefly anxious about—to note the altitude of the pass. This task he executed in a faultless manner. His map agreed beautifully with the calculations which, by way of check upon his work, I afterwards made from the compass bearings and distances. At all events, Shagdur's map bridged over an important gap in my own cartographical observations. The Cossacks killed and brought back with them a large number of deer, but had had a rather raw, cold time of it in the mountains, which were now one unbroken sheet of snow from summit to base.

Our new camp at Temirlik was as busy a centre as Tura-sallgan-uy on the Tarim. All the gold-prospectors and hunters who were on their way back from Bokalik naturally dropped in to pay us a visit, while several men came up from the low-lands seeking employment. I however lived peacefully and quietly on my terrace, having a good view of the camp over on the other side of the brook, which was crossed by a little bridge. My idyllic peace was perfectly undisturbed except for the hoarse cawings of the ravens, which housed in the caves, and which had to be frightened away with half-a-dozen shots when I wanted to begin my series of astronomical observations.

By the 11th of November, however, everything was ready for a fresh start. My first object was to explore and map a part of the Chimen-tagh and Akato-tagh which had never before been visited, and thus fill up a big lacuna which existed on my map of Northern Tibet. I did not enter upon this new expedition, which would last about a month, with any anticipations of pleasure, starting as I did towards the middle of a bitterly cold winter; but the work had to be done, and the best thing was of course to go and do it.

I selected the following men to accompany me: Cherdon, Islam Bai, Turdu Bai, Tokta Ahun, Khodai Värdi, and Togdasin. The last-named knew the region we were going to as intimately as he knew the country close around his own dwelling. Kutchuk and Niaz went with us for the first few days, to help lead the horses, which, after their thorough rest, were rather lively, and danced about a good deal with their loads. There were thirteen of them, and we also had four mules,

Our Headquarters Camp at Temirlik.

though no camels. I had promised myself that I would not be inconvenienced as I had been on my last trip, and therefore took a sufficient supply of tins of preserved food, and also the heating-stove. I appointed Shagdur chief of the camp at Temirlik, bidding him continue the meteorological observations. Before starting I packed away into one of the caves all the baggage I left behind, so as to secure it against the risk of fire, and directed that the entrance to the cave should be guarded day and night.

As the country we now explored was very similar to the regions I had visited during the past summer, I shall cut my

The Cossacks Cherdon and Shagdur.

narrative short. We traversed the 84 miles to the lower lake of Kum-köll in six days. The first day we marched diagonally across the valley of Chimen, over its level, sterile clay bottom, through a belt of sand-dunes 40 to 50 feet high, and then, by a gigantic gate-way, as it were, of granite cliffs, entered the Chimen-tagh. The glen, or rather gorge, of Savugluk was threaded by a brook, now, however, cased in ice as bright and transparent as glass. The path ascended all the time, and when we encamped for the night we obtained a splendid bird's-eye view of the whole of the valley behind us, right away to the dome-shaped mountains of the Akato-tagh, the crests of which were entirely free from snow from the one end to the other.

When next morning I was awakened out of my dreams after a beautiful night's rest, I had at first some difficulty in realising that we were again on the march. My short holiday had flown all too quickly. But there was no time for reflections; breakfast came in, was despatched, and off we went. We were now to traverse a mountainous region, in which granite of every conceivable variety was the prevailing formation. Togdasin led us across one of the foot-hills of the Chimen-tagh by an easy pass, where the snow lay in an unbroken sheet, completely covering up the marmots' holes. But the animals themselves were snugly curled away in their nests for the winter. Wise little creatures! Northern Tibet is raw enough in all conscience, even in summer.

The main pass by which we crossed the Chimen-tagh was remarkably easy, and consisted of a gently-rounded saddle, where the hard rock nowhere cropped out. On its southern side we went down into the same latitudinal valley which we had crossed higher up—that is, farther to the east—in July. The district a little beyond our camp bore the name of Att-attgan, or the "Shot Horse"; and was thus named because a hunter, who had had a long run of ill-luck, and was on the point of perishing of hunger, was at last forced to shoot and eat the horse he rode. The spot where we encamped was called Möllehkoygan, or the "Flung-away Saddle," because it was there the man abandoned his riding-saddle. Here the temperature dropped during the night of the 13th of November to —21°.9 C., or —7°.4 Fahr.

Shortly after entering, on the south side of the valley, a narrow glen which led up to the summit of the Kalta-alagan, we disturbed a herd of yaks, which were peacefully grazing on the mountain-side. In their flight they carried with them a troop of kulans, which were also grazing a little higher up.

We descended the pass on the other side by a steep watercourse strewn with blocks of granite and gravel, and shut in on both sides by reddish granite cliffs. Those on the left consisted of a series of sharp detached peaks and pinnacles, while the crest on the right, although quite as serrated, was more continuous. The strong sunshine, combined with the clear pure atmosphere, accentuated the shadows in every cleft and ravine and behind each cliffy headland, making them almost perfectly black, and causing the immense rocky wall to stand out in strong and fascinating relief.

Our Camp on the South of the Kalta-alagan (15-16 Nov., 1900).

The view southwards across this broad upland basin was unlimited; the mountain-chains along the horizon were mere narrow braidings, the outlines of which were only just perceptible in the strong sunlight. The stream which flowed from the upper to the lower lake of Kum-köll glittered like a silver ribbon. Upon emerging from the trumpet-shaped valley, we directed our course towards the south-west, and went along the foot of the mountains, the spurs and ramifications of which were sculptured into divers fantastic shapes by wind and weather. They resembled tables and chairs; they resembled cups; they resembled necks and heads. Indeed, in some places, where the

The Northern Face of the Kalta-alagan.

erosive power of the wind had wrought with the greatest effect, the thinner sections were completely cut through.

The lake of Ayag-kum-köll flashed like a gigantic sword-blade in the south-west. But as it was too far to do the distance in a single march, we halted in the barren waste, where we obtained water by digging down about 4½ feet.

The next day, which was a rest day, I granted Cherdon, Togdasin, Islam Bai, and Turdu Bai permission to go in quest of game. They divided into two parties; but only the two last-named returned in the evening. We of course wondered what had happened to the others; and when the evening passed, and the night became far advanced without our seeing anything of

them, we began to fear they had lost their way. Nor did they turn up until ten o'clock the next morning, and then in a truly deplorable condition. They had ridden up several rugged glens in pursuit of a flock of arkharis, until, the ascent growing too steep, they had been compelled to leave their horses behind them and scramble on over the rocks and screes without them. As they were trudging along, Togdasin all of a sudden collapsed, complaining of acute pain in the head and heart. He was unable to do another step, and even after Cherdon fetched up the horses was unable to keep his seat in his saddle. Under these circumstances they were forced to spend the night on an exposed gravelly slope, without either shelter or water. The sick man besought the Cossack to return and leave him where he was. He would soon die in any case, and it didn't matter much where it happened; but Cherdon stayed beside him all night, and every now and again shook him to prevent him from freezing to death in the bitter cold. As soon as ever day broke they were on their feet again, and dragged themselves slowly down to the camp. And Togdasin really was in a most pitiable condition. When we started again he had to be tied on his horse.

That night we encamped beside the Ayag-kum-köll, or the lower lake of Kum-köll, although the only accommodation consisted of a few scattered clumps of yappkak and small patches of ice along the shore. On the morning of the 18th of November we got the boat ready for a trip across the lake. My boatman was Tokta Ahun, and we carried a considerable load, as, in addition to the sail, oars, life-belts, sounding apparatuses, and other instruments, we also carried supplies for two days—meat, bread, preserved foods, and coffee—as well as cooking utensils, a *chugun*, or copper vessel, filled with water, and a little bag packed with pieces of ice. And when to these we added furs and felts, there was very little room left in our skiff. Once launched, I held a straight course for a prominent rocky headland in the south-west. The weather was magnificent, the lake still and calm, its surface just moved by a scarce perceptible swell. Every quarter of an hour I measured the velocity and sounded the depth. The latter increased as we approached the middle of the lake, where it amounted to 64½ feet. Soon after leaving the shore we encountered a thin sheet of ice, which, however, as it was also soft, we easily cut through. It extended on our left all the way

Our Camp on the South of the Kalta-alagan (continuation of Illustration on p. 9.)

to the southern shore, to which it was firmly attached. These patches of ice, which were from a quarter to half an inch thick, glittered in the sunshine with such intense brightness that it was impossible to look at them without smoked glasses. The wavelets which our boat made in passing set them rocking and grinding together. It appeared to me as if a thin layer of fresh water, coming from the stream, had spread itself over the salter water of the lake, and that the former then froze. Towards the west, however, there was no ice. The surface water had a temperature of —0°.3 C., or 31°.4 Fahr., so that it was very cool work using the sounding line. Every time it came up it was quite stiff and frozen, and it was as much as I could do to get my hands warm between the successive soundings.

The hours flew rapidly, and yet we did not seem to get any nearer to the rocky headland; but then we were crossing the lake diagonally. Towards the latter part of the afternoon we noticed eddies of dust and "sand-spouts" curling up along the southern shore. These soon became fused together into a greyish-yellow cloud, which drifted rapidly overland. It boded nothing good. Soon afterwards we began to feel the strong north-west wind which was blowing. Not long after that there came a rushing noise from the west. The first puffs of wind struck us. The surface of the lake, lately as smooth as a fish-pond, began to ripple all over. The ripples curled higher and higher, and soon grew into waves; and these again became bigger and bigger in proportion as we became more and more exposed to the full force of the gale. However, we held steadily on until the pitching of our heavily-laden boat compelled us to turn to the south and south-east. It now seemed only too likely that the wind would increase to a furious tempest, which might fling us on some inhospitable part of the shore, where our fragile craft would be rent to tatters. We must make haste and get to land as soon as we possibly could. It was already twilight, and it would be extremely hazardous to land in the dark, even at a favourable spot, when the lake ran so high behind us.

Before starting I had ordered the caravan, after marching for five hours along the northern shore, to stop for the night, and there light a big signal fire, to serve as a beacon to us in case it should be dark before we got to land. But we never saw their fire, and accounted for it partly on the ground that

the distance was too great, and partly that the air was heavily charged with dust.

Meanwhile our little skiff was pelting bravely along her dangerous course. Fortunately for us the wind and waves played havoc with the ice-sheets along the southern shore, otherwise their sharp edges would have cut our boat to pieces. After a while we detected a white line gleaming through the darkness ahead; it was made by the waves breaking against the beach, which, luckily, at this spot consisted of sand, and shelved steeply down to the lake. Before we knew where we were, we were amongst the "breakers." We were flung on shore, but the next moment were drawn back again by the recoil of the wave. Again we were flung on the sand, until the framework of our boat creaked ominously, and the canvas swelled as if it would burst. However, Tokta Ahun jumped nimbly out, and by our united exertions we got her up on to dry land, though not before two or three hungry waves had leapt into her, drenching the baggage in the after part.

We encamped quite close to the lake, behind a little hill, where we found plenty of *köuruk* plants, a species of low, woody steppe "grass," which made excellent fuel. The only signs of life apart from this were a few goose feathers and the kulan tracks. What the country was like we could not tell, for we were surrounded by pitch-dark night on every side; indeed, we were only able to find fuel by the aid of little fires, which we made here and there at intervals. As soon as we got together a sufficient supply, we crouched beside the fire, with our skin coats over our shoulders, and set to work to prepare a luxurious supper. Mine consisted of ox-tail soup, cheese, bread, and coffee, while Tokta Ahun munched a leg of mutton and washed it down with tea. After that we sat and puffed away manfully at our pipes, and discussed the projected journey which I intended to make across the Desert of Gobi to the marsh of Karakoshun. Tokta Ahun knew the latter intimately.

After the wind died away, and the sky cleared, it gave promise of being a cold night. At nine o'clock the thermometer was down to $-14°$ C., or 6°.8 Fahr., and as our fuel was all done, we thought it time to think of bed. My worthy boatman received my proposal, to convert the two halves of the boat into a tent, with a look of polite scepticism; but he very soon realised the ingenuity of the idea. Rolling ourselves up inside our kennels, we prepared, with a certain amount of trepidation, for

The Author in the Skiff on the North-west Shore of the Ayag-kum-köll ; Tokta Ahun holding it.

a bitter night. Indeed, after sleeping a few hours, I was awakened by the intense cold (−22°.1 C., or −7°.8 Fahr.). Thereupon I called my companion, and he helped me out of my nest, which was anything but adapted for light summer dreams. By this we were half-frozen, and I had lost all feeling in my feet, although they were protected by four pairs of woollen stockings and a pair of huge boots, lined with sheepskin with the wool still on, which Ali Ahun had made for me. Our first business was to collect enough fuel to make a big roaring fire; then I peeled off some of my integuments, so that I might restore the circulation by massage. But having got the night cold into our bones, we could not get it out again all the next day—in fact, it was not until we returned to our usual conditions of comfort that we thoroughly recovered.

When we launched again the temperature was −19° C., or −2°.2 Fahr., but the weather was magnificent as we started to row back across the lake towards the spot where the caravan were, or ought to be, waiting for us. The maximum depth was 78¾ feet; the surface water had a temperature of −0°.5 C., or 31°.2 Fahr., and the bottom water a temperature of −0°.3 C., or 31°.5 Fahr. Between the two was a layer which stood at −0°.0 C., or 32°.0 Fahr. Before we had gone very far, we thought we could see what we were in quest of—namely, the tent, yurt, and horses; but when we came near enough to distinguish clearly through the glass, the tent and yurt turned out to be two little hills, and the horses a troop of kulans.

After that we continued along the shore until in the far distance we perceived a column of something rising against the setting sun, though we could not quite make out whether it was smoke from a fire or a cloud of dust raised by a troop of kulans. In the twilight we doubled one rounded headland after another, until Tokta Ahun eventually ran aground in shallow water. All this time I sat in the fore part of the skiff, numbed with cold; but my boatman kept himself warm by paddling, whilst he sang a plaintive song about the reed-huts of Abdall. At length, however, we saw the light of a fire gleaming through the darkness; but these night fires, however encouraging at first, were apt to prove deceitful. So on the present occasion, as for three hours we rowed towards the firelight; then it disappeared. However, we still continued, shouting loudly at intervals, and at last were answered by the barking of dogs. Again the fire leapt up, this time quite close

beside us, and a man with a lantern came down to the lake to meet us.

Togdasin, whom we first fell in with up in the mountains, just as we did with Aldat, seemed destined to meet with the same fate as the Afghan. His illness was evidently taking a bad turn. The man crouched, as the Mussulmans do when they are not well, on his knees, with his body leaning forwards and his head touching the ground. We could not persuade him to touch a mouthful of food, though he continually craved for cold water, and was delirious, groaning every time he took his breath.

Tokta Ahun told me that this illness, which was unquestionably a very aggravated form of mountain-sickness, was very common amongst the hunters and gold-miners of those mountains. According as the individual attacked was a man or an animal (horse or camel), the Mussulmans called it *tutek* (or "shortness of breath"), or mountain-sickness; or they simply said, "Is allup ghetti"—that is to say, "He has got the mountain sickness." If a man had suffered from one attack previously there was little likelihood of his pulling through a second. When the attack first comes on, the sufferer has an intense desire to get down to the lowlands, though he never does get down unless he recovers in the mountains. (That very summer two gold-miners had died near Temirlik whilst on their way home.) But after the disease has made headway, the patient is said to be no longer able to appreciate his own condition. He does not know that he is ill, and is unable to describe his symptoms. These consist in the body swelling, the lips turning black, sleeplessness, and an entire want of appetite; and there is pain in the head and heart, combined with thirst, weakened heart-action, and falling temperature. According to Tokta Ahun's experience, smoking was the best remedy, and that was why we always saw him with his pipe in his mouth. For my own part, I have never felt any trace of mountain-sickness, not even when travelling at 15,000-17,000 feet above the level of the sea. The essential precaution is not to over-exert yourself.

However, it seemed as if death was going to be busy amongst us again; and the worst of it was I was perfectly powerless to combat the evil, for such treatment as I was able to prescribe seemed to be of no avail. Both the sick man and we who had been across the lake urgently needed a day's rest.

Islam Bai and Kutchuk Pushing Off. In the Background the Isolated Mountain Group at the North-west Corner of the Ayag-kum-köll.

Accordingly the next day I sent Islam Bai, with Kutchuk to row him, across the lake to take another series of soundings, which I required for the completion of my map. Unfortunately, Islam could not write, so that he was reduced to working mechanically, like a self-registering instrument. He did, indeed, understand a watch, and he also knew how to take the soundings at every quarter of an hour. The device he adopted was at the first sounding to tie a piece of string with one knot round the sounding-line; at the second sounding to tie another piece of string with two knots; and so on. These distances I could of course afterwards measure with a tape; and I already knew the mean rate at which the skiff travelled. That night it was extraordinarily dark, the sky being covered with clouds of such inky blackness that it was impossible to tell the difference between land, water, and atmosphere. When I opened the yurt a thin stream of light cleft the darkness; but, except for that, the only object the eye found to rest upon was the fire in front of the men's tent. The interior of my dwelling was fitted with every comfort. The floor on which my cases stood was covered with a Khotan carpet; my bed rested on the ground, and so served me for a divan as well. There I used to sit cross-legged and make my notes and draw my maps. At intervals Cherdon came in with a brazier of hot embers, without which it would have been difficult, if not impossible, to work in — 20°.0 C., or — 4°.0 Fahr.

When I now, surrounded as I am by all that I value most, recall those long, cold, silent winter evenings in Tibet, I am almost amazed that in that terrific loneliness—a loneliness which never changed day, month, or year—I never found the time hang heavy on my hands. But then I always had plenty to do; sometimes more than enough. I was surrounded by faithful and trusty servants, and I carried with me a little book containing Bible texts for every day in the year, which I knew was faithfully read in my own home in Stockholm. But it was always very depressing to have a sick man in camp, and Togdasin's ejaculatory supplications to his God—" Ya, Allah ! " " Ei Khodaim ! "—made me very uneasy. I could not get them out of my thoughts, even though I took out and tried to read Kipling's glorious songs in *The Seven Seas*.

CHAPTER II.

CROSSING THE PASSES OF NORTHERN TIBET.

THE return journey to Temirlik, which we begun on the 22nd of November, occupied 12 days, and led us across the mountain-ranges of Kalta-alagan, Chimen-tagh, and Akato-tagh—the last range twice.

The first day's march was a dogged piece of work. We were travelling west, and the wind—a half gale—was dead against us; while at 1 p.m. the thermometer stood at −2°.0 C., or 28°.4 Fahr., and at 2 p.m. at −10°.0 C., or 14°.0 Fahr. Seldom have I felt so exhausted and incapable. The ice on the Ayag-kum-köll was broken up by the storm, and driven to the eastern end of the lake. The lake itself looked fearfully grim; it was cold and dark blue, and edged round with white foam. To have attempted to cross it in our small craft would now to a dead certainty have been disastrous. The entire eastern half of the lake was only six or eight inches deep, and the boat would infallibly have been forced against the hard, jagged edges of the ice, and been rent to pieces. The bottom of the lake consisted of ooze, and had we been stranded in it, there would have been no help for us. The Cossacks, whilst out hunting, tried to cross on horseback the mouth of the river that connected the two lakes, but the first horse dropped into the quagmire up to the neck, and was only extricated with the utmost difficulty.

At the point where we now crossed the range, the architecture of the Chimen-tagh was of a highly remarkable character. The glen, by which we climbed up to the pass, was itself so high that its threshold or culminating point was scarcely distinguishable. On the northern side, however, the descent was correspondingly steeper, dropping step by step down a succession of rocky platforms or declivities, through a ravine squeezed in

Our Baggage Horses on the Shore of the Ayag-kum-köll.

between naked walls of rock and craggy promontories. We had already made a long march, and when I reached this mountain gorge the caravan was on in front. It was dark, and Islam Bai came back to meet me with a lantern; but all the same my horse stumbled every time he stepped from one platform to the next. The camp fire was a long way below our feet, in the deep glen of Kum-bulak, the springs of which, fenced round with sand, were sheeted with a thick panoply of ice. With very considerable difficulty we at length reached my yurt, which was set up on the brink of a rocky shelf, with a deep precipice immediately underneath it; though it was not until we were ready to start the next morning that I realized in what a dangerous position it stood. For it had been pitched right in the throat of a funnel, by which the rock avalanches that thundered down all the surrounding precipices made their way into the glens below. During the night I had, indeed, occasionally heard landslips and falling avalanches; but, happily, my yurt escaped uninjured.

Nor was the rest of the descent through that gorge any easier. In two or three places the ravine itself was choked with granite, which formed a giant staircase, the faces of the steps being each a dozen or fifteen feet high. Here we had to unload each of the animals in turn, and cautiously help it to slide down the steep slope. In another place, the gorge was covered from side to side by a thick sheet of ice, which penetrated every crevice and hole, and presented a surface as hard and slippery as porcelain. We had to strew sand on it before we durst think of leading the horses across. It was a real relief to emerge from this difficult ravine, and drop down into the Chimen valley, and encamp on the same spot where we were met by the relief caravan a month previously.

From this place I sent Kutchuk back to headquarters in charge of Togdasin, who was now somewhat better, and of the boat, whilst the rest of us continued our way north over the Akato-tagh. The night of the 27th of November was the coldest we had hitherto experienced that winter, namely −24°.6 C., or −12°.3 Fahr.

We crossed the Akato-tagh by the pass of Ghopur-alik (16,162 feet), up to which we climbed by a steep, gloomy granite glen. As we should be unable to do the whole distance in one march, we halted near the bottom of the glen, amid a chaos of fallen stones, without water, without grass, and without fuel.

Next morning we set ourselves to scramble up the steep acclivity. The horses breathed quick and with great difficulty, so that we had to let them stop incessantly, or we should have lost some of them. The summit of the pass was as sharp as a knife-blade, and the ascent on both sides precipitous. We all, of course, went on foot. I got some assistance by holding on to my horse's tail. The loads kept slipping off; the horses kept falling. We had to be constantly on the alert, and prompt in going to their assistance, for fear they should roll down the precipices and be smashed to pulp hundreds of feet below. Mules being surer footed than horses, I directed that one of them should carry my cases of instruments. The west wind was howling like a

The Glen leading up to the Pass of Ghopur-alik.

monsoon; and with the thermometer down to $-15°.0$ C., or $5°.0$ Fahr., it was what you might call decidedly fresh. Nevertheless the sky was bright and pure, and the mountains were bathed in sunshine. At length we reached the summit of the pass, and from its sharp crest obtained a sublime view. We beheld those stupendous mountain-ranges linked together as in a single panorama, each covered with snowy armour, which glittered dazzlingly in the sunshine; while an inextricable chaos of rugged heights shut in the west. Looking back, we saw the gorge by which we had ascended winding down the mountain side like a steep dry rivulet shrouded in gloom, and were amazed that we had been able to climb it. On the north the view was bounded

by the immense snowy mass of the Illveh-chimen, with its crowd of eccentric peaks, a group we had already made acquaintance with during our previous excursions.

Having taken the usual observations, I longed to fill my lungs with less rarefied air, and to get some shelter from the wind. We descended by another magnificent gorge, which was joined by numerous secondary glens from both sides. To stand in the throat of one of these and look up, was like gazing through a gigantic gateway, with perfectly perpendicular walls of rock, at one of Nature's most eccentric efforts in the way of cliff formation, with the snow hanging like friezes and patterned reliefs from every projecting shelf. These snowy draperies, tinged as they were by the soft purple glow of the afternoon sun, were not unlike the decorations in a Tibetan temple.

There was again no grass where we encamped, at 13,311 feet above the sea. The wind still continued unabated; the thermometer registered −12°.0 C., or 10°.4 Fahr., inside my yurt, and the brazier of hot embers was not sufficient to keep the ink from freezing in my pen. Owing to the cross draughts, which we were unable effectually to shut out, a stearine candle burnt down in three hours, guttering fearfully before it went out. Cherdon shot a yak bull, and I heartily pitied Turdu Bai, Tokta Ahun, and Khodai Värdi, when at 9 o'clock at night they went out in the stinging cold to cut him up. As long as the body was warm, they were able to keep their own hands warm. They returned at midnight, each man carrying a load of meat, frozen as hard as stone. When they chopped it up with their axes the pieces scattered in all directions like broken glass.

Our next camp was somewhat better; the hard frozen tussock grass of the highland steppes made excellent fuel, and the snow gave us a supply of water. The next morning the sun tipped the rocky pinnacles of the Illveh-chimen whilst we were still shrouded in gloom; but there was no wind. We soon got started; but did not travel very far, for in a glen which ran up into the mountain-mass just mentioned, we discovered exceptionally good grazing, and could not afford to go past it. I was just putting up my theodolite stand when down came the westerly storm, and put an end to all work out of doors. Whipping up the men's tent, it carried it clean away, and dropped it on the ice on the bottom of the glen.

Shortly afterwards we perceived a man riding along the

flank of the opposite mountain on a camel. Thinking that he was possibly a messenger looking for me, I sent Tokta Ahun to find out who it was. But the man turned out to be a Mongol, belonging to a train of pilgrims on their way from Kara-shahr to Lassa. The rest of his caravan had gone by in the morning, and he had lingered behind because his camel had grown tired.

Every year large numbers of Mongol pilgrims travel from the tributary states of Russia and China, in the north of Asia, to the holy city of Tibet, *viâ* Temirlik, Ghaz-nor, and Tsaidam. They always make the journey out during the late autumn or winter, and return at the same season in the following year. They never pass through Abdall in the warm season, lest their camels should be tormented to death by the gad-flies. By the time they return they are always in a sad plight, only a few of their animals are left, and most of the men are reduced to travelling on foot. Upon reaching Abdall they generally try to exchange their exhausted camels for horses, so as to be able to reach their distant homes before the season gets too far advanced. One poor camel is considered equivalent to a horse, three camels in moderate condition as equivalent to one perfectly fresh camel, and a thoroughly emaciated beast as equivalent to one ass. The pilgrims carry their food in boxes and sacks, and on their way back usually replenish their supplies at Abdall. When going to Lassa, it is their habit to leave their camels behind them, with their kindred by race, the Mongols of Tsaidam, and perform the rest of the journey on horses, which they there hire. In this way several of the Tsaidam Mongols earn a considerable income every year.

These people must be animated by an intense conviction of the truth of their religion, when they sacrifice an entire year, with the fatigues, privations, and expenses incidental to it, for the sake of visiting the holy city, and taking part in its temple festivals and processions. They always arrange to be accompanied by a pilgrim who has been to Lassa before, and at Tsaidam they pick up a guide who knows where all the suitable camping-places are. The journey to Lassa takes them four months; for they travel leisurely and comfortably, using *argussun* (*argol*), that is yak-dung, for fuel. The evenings they spend round their camp-fires, drinking tea and eating *tsamba*. And when at length they catch sight, from the last mountain rampart they cross, of the white temple façades of Lassa, their hearts are, I daresay, as full of holy reverence as those of the Mecca

The Cossacks Cherdon and Shagdur, and their Trophies—Ali Ahun, the Tailor, on the right.

pilgrims, when, from the top of Mount Arafat, they for the first time set eyes upon their holy city.

It was a curious experience to find these pilgrims in our immediate neighbourhood following the trail that led to Lassa. For one moment I was tempted to disguise myself as a Buriat, and, taking Shagdur with me, go and attach myself to their company. But, upon second thoughts, I saw it would not do; I had other plans for the winter, and it would be inconvenient to alter my arrangements.

In the meantime we followed the trail of the Mongols' camels —that is to say, the light-coloured indentations which their soft pads had made in the sand. The prospect towards the north was arrested by the Astyn-tagh, which stretched right across from east to west. Towards evening the atmosphere assumed a light blue tint, although there was a white shimmer immediately overhead: in all probability this last was caused by the rays of the moon breaking into delicate pencils of light. The mountains wore a pinky colour, and gave a decided impression of wintry cold. No matter how warm we were personally, we could not help "seeing" that this region suffered from the disintegrating power of frost.

Travelling east, we at length approached the salt lake of Uzun-shor, lying close to the northern foot of the Akato-tagh; indeed the latter thrust several small spurs out into it. The lake was surrounded by luxuriant kamish (reeds) and bushes. As we crossed over these ramifications, we observed a great number of fresh-water springs bubbling out of the ground, and, lower down, uniting together into a single stream, before they entered the lake. Although there was ice at the embouchure, the salt water of the lake itself was quite free from ice, notwithstanding that its temperature was —7°.9 C., or 17°.8 Fahr. In places the layer of salt which covered the bottom of the lake was so thick as to project above the water in the form of ridges and small hills.

We were all glad to reach "home" again, on the evening of the 5th of December, especially as everything was quiet and in order. The springs of Temirlik were now hidden under big pyramids and domes of ice. Togdasin had, it was evident, experienced a serious breakdown, for he was no better. The men had lodged him in a cave next to that which I occupied, and, as long as I remained in camp, I nursed him myself with every attention. When, at the end of December, the head-

quarters camp was flitted down to Charkhlik, he was taken with it, and I did not see him again until April of the following year. He was then a cripple ; both his feet had literally dropped off bit by bit ; but he was nevertheless cheerful and contented, and I gave him what I could spare for his support.

As for the Mongol caravan, Shagdur told me that it consisted of 75 men—all lamas—and 2 women, and that it rested one day at Temirlik. One of the lamas, or priests, was a man of distinguished rank, for the others treated him with the greatest possible respect. Of these about 25 were so poor that they were travelling on foot, and had only been allowed to join the caravan on condition that they acted as servants to their more well-to-do countrymen. The Mongols had with them money to the amount of about 10 yambas (£75–£100) ; besides which they had about 120 yambas (£1,000–£1,200) of tribute for the Dalai Lama. In other words, they brought money with them to pay for the all festivals, ceremonies, and solemnities in which they were to take part. It is upon this " Peter's pence " that " the Pope of Lassa " lives. The band was well-armed against Tangut robbers and other enemies, having about 30 Mongol muskets, 2 Berdan rifles, and 1 Winchester. Shagdur invited two or three of them to go out with him to shoot kulans, but they replied that blood-shedding was absolutely forbidden so long as they were on pilgrimage. The man who lagged behind was a lama, who had spent ten years in Lassa, and was now going to stay there another three. I just wondered whether he would recognise Shagdur again, in case we should, later on, be so fortunate as to reach the holy city. The caravan consisted of 120 camels and 40 horses, and, in addition to these, they led seven other horses of exceptional value, intended as a present to the Dalai Lama. Their rations consisted of minced meat, dried and frozen into small lumps, roasted wheat-flour (*talkan*), and tea.

The pilgrims manifested the liveliest curiosity in our camp, and asked no end of questions as to what I was doing in that part of the world. I have not the slightest doubt that on arriving at Lassa they related to the authorities all the information they succeeded in picking up concerning us, and that this was one of the reasons why the northern frontier of the country was afterwards so jealously guarded.

Shagdur on his side, also, extracted some useful information from them. The Mongols told him that a strict watch was kept

upon all pilgrims who approached Lassa. As soon as they reached the borders of Nakkchu everybody was stopped and examined, and compelled to state his name, the place whence he came, the over-lama under whose authority he lived, as well as to show his passport, which must not only set forth which temple or monastery he was ascribed to, but also clearly explain the real object of his pilgrimage. After all these formalities had been complied with, a report was made to Lassa; but the pilgrims were not allowed to proceed until a special pass arrived for them from the authorities of the city. But once they got there, they were subjected to no further control. These precautions were said to be taken with the object of preventing "Russians"—that is to say, any Europeans—from smuggling themselves into Lassa. For the same reason orders had been sent a few years previously to the Turgut (Torgod) tribes, who are Russian subjects, that no pilgrims from their country would be admitted to Lassa; but just recently the inhibition had been cancelled, and their pilgrimages had been resumed. One of the lamas of the caravan said there existed a prophecy in an ancient and holy book at Lassa, which said that the Tsagan Khan, or White Emperor, would some day rule over the whole world, conquer Tibet and destroy Lassa, and that the lamas would then carry the holy things up to the top of an inaccessible mountain in the south of Tibet. The same man invited Shagdur to travel with him; he said he would have no difficulty, especially if he gave out that he was a Turgut Mongol. In the evening, when the camp was quiet, I discussed these things with my faithful Cossack, who was intensely interested in all he heard. From his boyhood he had heard speak of the holy city, and was consumed with eagerness to visit it. He had, of course, no idea that it was my intention to try my luck along the prohibited roads. But, as I have already said, Patience! I had more important matters to attend to first. The very idea of trying to enter Lassa in disguise was one of those perilous enterprises which never tempt a man except when he is young.

I spent six days in our headquarters camp at Temirlik. The ice volcanoes continued to grow around the springs, and the temperature went down to − 27°.0 C., − or 16°.6 Fahr. I was supposed to rest; but there were a thousand things to attend to. Once more I took a complete series of astronomical observations, to determine the position of this important point of cartographical control. I also developed the negatives which I had recently

taken ; got ready a new post-bag for Kashgar, and paid up all arrears of wages.

One sunny day we carried Togdasin out into the open air, and the Mussulmans gathered around him, and sought to banish his sickness by all sorts of ritual, including the sacrifice of a he-goat to Allah.

I naturally spent a good deal of time, too, in preparing for my forthcoming expedition through the Desert of Gobi. Provisions and stores, sufficient for a journey of over 1,200 miles, were selected and put on one side, divided into loads, packed up in boxes and bags, and lashed to the pack-saddles, ready for lifting on the camels' backs. My little yurt was repaired and renovated, its sides being re-covered with white felt, and the top or dome with red. Then I gave Cherdon lessons in the art of taking meteorological observations, although he had already made a beginning during our last trip to Kum-köll. He was to attend to this business during my absence, and generally to read and look after the self-registering instruments.

The men I left behind were Cherdon, Islam Bai, Turdu Bai, and Ali Ahun. I also engaged, temporarily, five hunters and gold-miners to help them down to Charkhlik, where the amban (Chinese governor) and native begs promised to look after them. In fact, all they had to do during our absence was to take care of my cases and other belongings, and see that the animals were in good condition, ready against when I should want them in the spring. I also ordered Islam Bai to send from Abdall two canoes, with paddles and fishing-nets, to the lake of Chöll-köll in the marsh of Kara-koshun ; and he was to instruct the men who took them that they were to set up a *nishan*, or "landmark," on the top of some high and conspicuous sand-dune, so that we might know where to look for them. I saw distinctly that we should not get down there until after the ice had broken up.

CHAPTER III.

A JOURNEY TO ANAMBARUIN-GOL.

My new caravan consisted of the Cossack Shagdur and the following Mussulmans—Faisullah, who acted as caravan-bashi, or leader of the caravan; Tokta Ahun; Mollah from Abdall, who was to guide me to Anambar-ula; Kutchuk; Khodai Kullu; Khodai Värdi; Ahmed; and Tokta Ahun, the hunter, whom we had recently engaged, and who, that we might distinguish him more easily from the other man of the same name, we called Li Loyeh—he spoke Chinese and Mongolian, had stolen horses at Bokalik, and was not quite right in his head. The animals embraced eleven camels, to carry the baggage, and eleven horses, to ride on. This left only one reserve horse; but if we required more, we could buy them from the Mongols. Three dogs accompanied us: Yolldash, Malenki, and Malchik. As it was my intention to sound Lake Ghaz, I took Turdu Bai with me for two or three days in charge of the boat. He wanted to go the whole journey, but after all the exertions he had undergone, I thought he needed rest.

On the morning fixed for starting, the 12th of December, I was awakened before it was light; the men drove in the horses, and the camels stood all ready tethered beside their loads. The day broke bright and clear, the atmosphere being still and the sky serene; in fact, it was a perfect spring day when we set off. All the men were eager and cheerful at the prospects of the trip. For my own part I was longing for the comparative ease of a journey across the desert. This time we should have nothing to fear from driving snows and sleet of hail. Cold, indeed, we might expect, for it was the middle of winter; but it would be a dry cold, which we could fight if we had plenty of fuel. It was also gratifying to have three full months of winter before us; we ought to get most of the problems of the

trip settled before the warm days began again in spring. Nevertheless we did not neglect the precaution of taking light summer clothing.

After a friendly farewell to poor Togdasin and those I was leaving behind, I gave the order to march. Tinkle, tinkle said the bells, as the long dark train of camels stalked away with lordly gait from Sum-tun-buluk,* or the Three Hundred Springs; for thus Temirlik was also called in a combination of one Mongolian and two Tibetan words. All the camels behaved themselves well. But the foam clung like soapsuds about the dromedary's lips, and kept dropping to the ground in big clots; he would have made a fuss if he could. One of his forelegs was chained to his pack-saddle, so that, though he was able to walk well enough, he could not run away. He was fastened to his predecessor in the string by both a rope and a chain, and had a muzzle on to prevent him from biting his neighbours. Truly a magnificent brute, this veteran from Kashgar, with his wild, coal-black, flashing eyes, especially when he rolled them so as to show their gleaming whites, as he always did when in a bad humour.

Every animal in the caravan was in the pink of condition; indeed, two or three of the camels had been idle ever since they arrived at Yanghi-köll, more than a year ago. All had got their winter coats, as thick and fluffy as wool. The two biggest and quietest camels were selected to carry my personal belongings. The bulk of the loads consisted of flour, rice, maize, and *talkan* (roasted flour); but the weight would diminish every day, so that by the time we reached the regions where it became necessary to carry ice and fuel, we should have animals to spare for the purpose.

Our programme for the present journey was as follows:— First, I proposed to cross over the Astyn-tagh, and then skirt its southern flank, so as to clear up its orographical structure. This would take us to the north-east, into a region called by the Mongols Anambar-ula,† or by the Mussulmans Khan-ambal, the latter word being a corruption of the former. The distance was 240 miles. Thence I proposed to strike to the north, across an unknown part of the Desert of Gobi, until I reached the mountain ranges on its northern confines. After that we intended

* The Mongolian *buluk* = the Turki *bulak* = Eng. *spring* (of water).

† Or, with the genitive suffix, Anambaruin-ula.

to turn west, until we came to the springs of Altimish-bulak, whence I hoped to explore the ruins which Ördek discovered in the Lop Desert. Finally, we should cross the desert itself to Abdall, and thence to Charkhlik, our next rendezvous.

The journey to Anambar, which I will now briefly describe, took seventeen days. The first two took us across a hard frozen marsh, with hard crisp deposits of salt and sharp-edged laminæ of clay, to a spring that lay north of Lake Ghaz. The 14th of December I made a little excursion to the lake, thinking to row across it and sound it; for I had been told that it was so salt

The Camels Loaded up.

it never froze. We readily found the way to it by following a kulan path; but the ground at the lake-side, despite the frost, was so soft, that the horses dropped in up to their knees. In a few places the ice formed arches or bridges which we crossed, but many of them were so thin that the horses' feet went through and down the poor beasts came. It was no easy matter to cross this treacherous belt; but we did manage it at last, and we encamped near the mouth of the stream which collected all the spring-fed rivulets of the Chimen valley, to pour them into the lake. A little distance away we saw five yaks, and were just starting to hunt them, when Tokta Ahun observed that one of them was spotted, consequently they were tame

yaks, and had probably run away from some Mongol camp in the neighbourhood.

A sail on the lake was not to be thought of; it appeared to be ice-bound throughout. But, as we had the boat with us, we converted one-half of it into a sledge, its wooden framework making capital runners. Seated in this light equipage, I was drawn by Tokta Ahun and Khodai Kullu a merry race across the frozen surface. The ice was uneven, sometimes hummocky, sometimes covered with a thin layer of water, sometimes cracked and fissured. But the sledge rode easily over all obstacles, and I was just beginning to think that I

Camp in Northern Tibet.

might obtain a second series of soundings right across the lake, when the ice-sheet began to crack and wobble. Tokta Ahun went through, and would have had a cold bath had he not clung to the edge of the boat.

After a quiet, uneventful night on the shore of this salt marsh, we rejoined the caravan next day at Yulgun-dung, or the "Tamarisk Hill." Here we rested one day; and I sent Tokta Ahun up the glen which penetrated the Akato-tagh north-east of our camp, to see if there was a practicable road. His report, when he returned in the evening, was to the effect that the glen led up to a pass, and that on the northern side of the range, a similar pass led out upon the table-lands imme-

diately south of the Astyn-tagh. On the 17th of December we started therefore to follow his track. The previous night was the coldest we had experienced so far that winter, namely, −29°.6 C., or −21°.3 Fahr. Turdu Bai went back to Temirlik with the boat.

Turning our back upon the scanty vegetation from which the Tamarisk Hill derived its name, we started to cross the sterile, gravelly, gently-rising ground which led up to the mountains; and entered them by means of a rocky gateway, about 120 yards wide, with a seven foot deep gully at the bottom, which sometime or other had carried off the rainfall of those now arid

Glen Leading up to the Pass of the Akato-tagh.

regions. All day long the glen ascended, its floor being as level as an asphalted street, though it wound backwards and forwards round several sharp elbows. Thus I had to take fresh compass bearings about every three minutes, as one rocky buttress after another hid the next angle of the glen from my sight.

The substance of which the Akato-tagh was built up in this locality consisted of fine yellow argillaceous rock, but so soft that I was easily able to break off pieces with my naked hand. No wonder, then, the precipitation had worn the surface into the most fantastic and extraordinary shapes. On both sides an endless number of narrow gateways and dark arches were cut sheer down through the perpendicular walls, affording exit to a

host of small torrents, streams, and dry ravines. The entire region was singularly barren, cold, and arid. The main glen was in places so narrow that two or three men were required at each projecting angle to prevent the camels' bulky loads from jostling against it. Every now and again this extraordinary "hollow" road opened out before us a fascinating perspective of views, the precipitous—sometimes overhanging—buttresses standing one behind the other *en échelon*, like the side scenes in a theatre. The bottom of the glen was choked with masses of stone of every conceivable shape and size, while others seemed to hang over our heads, as it were, by a mere thread. It was

Making a Road over the First Pass.

difficult to understand what kept them in position; the first gust of wind, or the first gentle shower would seem to be enough to send them hurtling down. My heart always came into my mouth when the caravan was passing these dangerous places. Pyramids, walls, towers, terraces, corridors, grottoes followed one another in never-ending succession. However, the caravan steadily and quietly pursued its course along the bottom of the smooth watercourse. Fortunately it was dry; otherwise the camels would have slipped and slided as badly as if they had been travelling on ice. As it was they marched confidently along, and left no impress of their footprints behind them. In fact, it was not easy to see the trail of the iron-shod horses.

But by degrees the relative altitudes decreased, and the glen lost its character of a deep-cut gorge. However, we did not quite reach the top of the pass, but encamped just below it, having brought up with us sufficient ice in *tagars* or sacks to last four days. Early next morning we said adieu to this silent, desolate camp, fully convinced that we should nevermore see it again. The last part of the ascent just before the summit of the pass was reported to be steep and difficult; and Tokta Ahun and two or three others started early to level it down with spades. But when we reached the spot, I was amazed to find that, instead of continuing up the main glen, they had turned off to the east, through a side-glen, which was so narrow that when a camel stopped at an angle it was impossible to get past him. Still, our guide knew what he was about; and there they were, working with their spades amid a cloud of dust. By dint of a good deal of hauling and pulling and pushing, we managed to get the first of the camels up. Two or three of the animals fell, and had to be unloaded, and their loads carried up by the men. But the beast which carried the fuel had the worst time of it, owing to the bulky character of his load; however, after coming down on his knees once, he succeeded in pulling through all right.

Upon reaching the top of the pass (11,372 feet), Tokta Ahun turned to the south-east. This struck me as being wrong; but our guide had reconnoitred the road himself, and now assured me that the glen we were striking into, a deeply-scarped gorge like that by which we ascended, would soon curve round to the east and north-east, and eventually lead out into the open country. However, down we went, zigzagging backwards and forwards in the most surprising manner. There was only one difficult piece of road to face, he said, where the gorge was so deep and so narrow that there was scarcely room for a man on foot to get through; but the camels could be led over the declivity at the right.

A little bit further down the whole caravan came to a dead stop. The men hurried on to the front. The gorge was so narrow that the camels' loads touched the rocks on both sides, and the beasts were unable to advance until the rocky walls had been pared down with axes. Whilst the men were doing this, I went on a little way ahead, until I eventually came to a spot that was ten times worse than anything we had yet encountered. The gorge literally merged into a tunnel, which ran

close in underneath the precipices on the left. Indeed, the rocks overhung it, and were cracked and riven in a highly dangerous way. There was no road over the top of this natural tunnel; the only path led through it. But just at its narrowest part the passage was choked by an avalanche of stones, which had come down quite recently. Some of the blocks we were fortunately able to roll aside by all of us putting our shoulders to them together. Others which were too big to be moved bodily were hewn to pieces with spades and axes. After widening the passage by cutting away the rocks on both sides, we first led through the horses, and then along the path which they made cautiously guided the camels one by one. The camel with the fuel, however, stuck fast in the middle, and in the midst of the desperate efforts he was making to force his way through, his load crashed to the ground, bringing down two or three big fragments of rock on the top of it. My heart turned over when I saw the caravan disappear in a cloud of dust. Had a fresh avalanche of stones fallen just then, whilst we were in the tunnel, we should have been buried alive.

Tokta Ahun cut a sorry figure, and lamely confessed that he had not ridden to the end of the dangerous gorge. Hitherto he had always been so very accurate in the information he gave me.

I have never seen a more peculiar glen formation than that was. It really consisted of two glens, or rather was a glen constructed in two storeys. The lower storey plunged down from the floor of the upper one to a further perpendicular depth of over thirty feet. The sides of the former were cut into terraces or shelves to which there was no possible access. Further on, the upper glen, too, grew so narrow, that the two storeys, the upper and the lower, merged into one, forming a tremendously deep fissure carved right through the argillaceous rock. The bottom was shrouded in gloom, and subject to frequent rockslides of the most dangerous character.

However, on we went, stopping time after time, now to cut away some projecting angle, now to shovel aside the fallen débris which impeded our path. At last the caravan stopped in dead earnest. Tokta Ahun came and reported that there was no road. The ravine was choked with rock and stone, which had shot down the mountains from several hundreds of feet above our heads. However, a stream of water had forced a passage underneath the rockslide, and the only way to advance

The Cul-de-Sac where we Turned Back.

was over the top of this "glacier" mouth, as it were—that is, if it would bear the weight of the camels. Before deciding anything I preferred to reconnoitre myself. A little way past this pre-

The Two-storied Glen.

A Vault in the Glen.

carious and perilous arch the lower valley narrowed to a mere crevice of not more than two feet in width, with a depth of from forty to fifty feet, while the stream issued from an under-

ground cavern. Thus the gorge became a vault, or a cave passage, so dark that a cat could hardly have found its way through it.

The situation was now clear: we must turn back. But the caravan was so tightly wedged in between the rocky walls that we had to back the last of the camels some distance before we could get room to turn him round in, and we had to do the same with each of the others. By this it was quite dark, and we were forced to encamp in a small expansion of the glen, where we were safe from being crushed by an avalanche of stones, though there was nothing to give the animals, either to eat or to drink. How dark, how silent, how weird it was in that rock-lined trough so distant from the busy haunts of men! Especially when the camels shook their heads, causing their bells to tinkle with a thin metallic sound. The voices of the men, chattering around the fire, were multiplied tenfold by the echoes. It was like talking in a dim wide cloister, or in the empty banqueting hall of a feudal castle.

It was irksome to return in our own footsteps, and not least so that our path lay along the bottom of a ravine, where tons upon tons of rocks hung, as it were, by a thread above our heads, threatening to crush us and our camels like beetles. If a big rockslide had taken place during the night, we should have been caught like rats in a trap. It took us a whole day to get back to the point where the main glen bifurcated. In the meantime Tokta Ahun and Mollah rode on ahead to the top of the main glen, and when they came back in the evening, assured us that this time they really had discovered a road through the intricate labyrinth of the Akato-tagh.

On the morning of the 20th of December I was awakened while it was still pitch dark. It was stinging cold, and I made haste to dress, wishing I had a cup of boiling hot tea.

Long before it was light some of the men had hastened up to the pass to level down the road and make it easier. This time we were on the right path; but the last bit of the ascent was dangerously steep—the camels would never have got up without help. But, once we were at the top, the extensive view which opened out before us proved that we were at the summit of the range (12,133 feet). On the north was the long-drawn ridge of the Astyn-tagh; on the south Chimen-tagh; south-east the desolate wastes of Tsaidam; while to the east was something which might have been a

mountain, or a cloud, or dust haze, or merely a reflection of the desert.

The Akato-tagh is unlike any other mountain system of

Taking up the Camels one by one to the Main Pass.

The Spring of 22nd December, 1900.

Northern Tibet, in that it consists of an inextricable chaos of rounded domes and flattened tops of argillaceous rock, cleft by narrow ravines and unfathomable fissures, driven in every

conceivable direction. A gloomy and lifeless region! The only indications of animate existence the skeleton of a kulan and the track of a bear! But when we got down to leveller ground, we came across a path which must have been made by human travellers.

Owing to our getting entangled in this defile, we lost so much time that our supply of ice was now rapidly running out. So, for safety's sake, I sent back two or three of the men in the morning, with six horses, to fetch a fresh supply from Yulgun-dung. Fortunately also, close beside the spot where we encamped, we found a few snowdrifts in a sheltered crevice.

Tokta Ahun had spoken about a pass, Kara-davan, which would have to be crossed on the way to Anambar, and after we had traversed in a north-easterly direction the broad, flat valley which intervened between the Akato-tagh and the Astyn-tagh, it began to be time to look about for his pass. We soon discovered again the track which we had noticed the day before, at the bottom of the Akato-tagh, but it was now considerably broader. Continued use had made it deeper and more conspicuous, even where the ground was hard. The hills and projecting crags on both sides were crowned with *ilehs* or "landmarks," consisting of small heaps of stones. In places there were several parallel tracks, showing that a large company had travelled over the ground in separate columns. It was clear that this route had been employed by Mongol pilgrims on their way to and from Lassa, when the usual roads were either unsafe or in a disturbed condition. We lost it, however, amongst the hills. Nevertheless we pressed on up the valley until we came upon what we least expected to find in this indescribably barren region, namely, a little spring bubbling up in the midst of excellent grass. Though the spring itself was salt, the patches of ice which formed immediately below it for about 160 yards down the valley, were perfectly fresh. When they stopped, so also did the vegetation.

When, however, we at length came out upon the plain, we found that it was a thousand times worse than the labyrinthine defiles of the mountains. The surface consisted of saliferous clay, crumpled into ridges and folds and steps as hard as brick, and all running at right angles to the way we were going, that is, they stretched from north-west to south-east. It was just as though the integument of the earth had shrivelled up, and thus become covered with wrinkles like a withered apple. The

Cooking and Washing at Anambaruin-gol—Looking North-west.

interior of the ridges, which were three to four feet high, was hollow, and, as we could see through their innumerable cracks and crevices, perfectly black. The spaces which intervened be-

Grass at the Spring of 22nd December.

Gravel-and-Shingle Terrace at the Spring of 22nd December.

tween the ridges were only three or four yards across. Two or three of the men, who went on in advance, were kept hard at work levelling them down with spades.

The next evening, too, we were lucky enough to find a spring, with grass around it. Whilst we were pitching camp amongst the thickets of reeds, Shagdur stalked a solitary wild camel. Upon hearing the muffled echo of the shot, I rode out to see what he was doing. The animal, which was wounded in one of its forelegs, was vainly trying to escape; but Khodai Kullu, coiling a lassoo, flung it round its neck, and dragged it to the ground, whereupon it was soon despatched. This supplied the men with fresh meat for several days; nor did we omit to take possession of the valuable fat in its humps. To judge from the tracks and droppings, this spring would appear to be frequented by large herds of wild camels in the summer.

The next morning, after collecting a supply of fuel, and filling a couple of sacks with ice, and cutting up the camel skin for pillows, we started along the track before mentioned, which we lost up in the hills, but had now found again at the springs. Here there were no less than twenty parallel tracks. Perhaps they were made at a time when the Mongols, who dwell farther east, used to drive their flocks to Temirlik to graze. It was quite dusk when we reached the foot of the Astyn-tagh, and pitched our tents at the entrance of a glen between two subsidiary ranges, in a spot that was absolutely destitute of organic life. Considering the bleak and desolate character of the region, the Christmas Eve we spent there was all that could well be wished. The air was still, the sky clear and blue. As soon as the camp was settled down, we kindled a big roaring Yule fire, though that was the only thing to remind me of the festivities at home. Wishing to banish the melancholy reflections which that day always brought to me when in the heart of Asia, I called in Shagdur, and unfolded to him my idea of trying to reach Lassa. He was immensely interested, and thought that we could manage it, if we travelled in the prescribed garb, and secured trustworthy Mongols to travel with. After this we often discussed this adventurous project of an evening, though we generally spoke in Russian, so as not to let the Mussulmans know what we were talking about.

During the last days of the century we threaded the valleys which lay between the parallel chains of the Astyn-tagh. It was very cold, and the wind still continued, bringing with it snow, though it only remained in sheltered hollows and corners. Whenever the clouds broke, the mountains peeped out in their white shrouds. The track was easy to travel: we crossed over

View looking S.E. from our Camp at Anambaruin-gol.

a succession of small, self-contained basins, which, after rain, would be converted into miniature lakes, though the water would of course soon evaporate again. The thin steppe tussock grass, with the teresken and yapptak scrub, furnished us with ample fuel. The only evidences of wild animals which we noticed during these days were the tracks of wild camels and a few ravens which accompanied us for short distances. Tokta Ahun, who was a far less trustworthy guide in these regions than amongst the marshes of Kara-koshun, never managed to hit the pass of Kara-davan; however, I found my way through the mountains without his help.

When I peeped out of my yurt on the morning of the 27th of December, it was stinging cold, and the ground was covered thick with snow; in fact, it continued snowing all day. However, the snow was welcome, as it gave us a supply of water for the horses; they, poor brutes, had had none for two days! On the 29th of December we went to sleep in a storm. We awoke the following morning in a storm. We rode the whole day through tempestuous squalls; and at night, when we again encamped, it was once more in a storm. It was impossible to keep the draughts out of the yurt; and we had to pin it down well all round, to prevent it from blowing over, which might have been fatal, for I had a lighted stove inside it. Oh, that we were in the desert! The atmosphere there during the cold months was never in this state of infernal uproar!

Some of the springs beside which we encamped bore Chinese names—Lap-shi-chen, Ku-shu-kha, Ya-ma-chan. The last-named perpetuated a bloody episode in recent Chinese history. In the summer of 1896, during the time that I was in northern Tibet, the scattered remnant of the rebellious Dungans,* who had been driven out of the district of Si-ning, arrived at this spring. The Chinese despatched an army against them from Sa-chow, and an engagement took place. The Dungans were defeated and very many of them killed, while others were taken prisoners and carried to Sa-chow. A large number of skeletons were still lying in the immediate vicinity of the spring. About 500 of the Dungans, including women and children, escaped, taking with them a number of camels, mules, and horses; but, being totally destitute, they were forced gradually to consume all these. At the height of this commo-

* See my former book, *Through Asia*, vol. II., pp. 1175, 1203-9 and 1247.

tion, a deputation was sent from Abdall to Sa-chow, consisting of one Chinaman, one Dungan, and two Mussulmans, namely, Islam Ahun, a relative of Tokta Ahun, and Erkeh Jan, the elder brother of Niaz Baki Beg, one of our friends at Kum-chappgan. These four men, when on their way back, fell in with the fugitive Dungans amongst the Astyn-tagh mountains, and were all killed by them at this spring of Ya-ma-chan. The 500 Dungans continued on to Abdall, where they were met by a Chinese force, which compelled them to capitulate. They were then taken to Kara-kum, a newly-founded colony to the south of Korla, where they are living peacefully and unmolested at the present day, a proof that the Chinese do not always deal barbarously with their rebellious subjects.

A stone pyramid, five feet high, which stood beside the spring of Ya-ma-chan, bore a plate with a Chinese inscription; but whether it commemorated this wretched victory over a handful of weary fugitives, or whether it merely indicated that this remote and valueless region belonged to the Celestial Empire, I do not know.

Some thirty years ago Dungan hunters often used to visit these regions, though they left no memorials behind them, except some fox-traps, which the Mussulmans called *kazghak*, for at that time fox skins were worth a good deal of money. These Dungan traps looked exactly like churchyard graves, or oblong heaps of stones, but were hollow inside, like a tunnel. A piece of meat was placed at the far-end to serve as bait, and just above it a heavy stone, fixed in such a way that, when the fox crept into the tunnel, the stone would crash down upon him and kill him.

During the night of the 30th–31st December the tempest raged more fiercely than ever, and brought the roof-spars of my yurt to the ground. New Year's night was, however, bright and biting cold; and the moon glittered like an electric light. I read the Bible texts and psalms which are sung in every church in Sweden on the last night of the year, and so entered upon the new century, alone, solitary, though of good heart, in the centre of the vast Asiatic continent. It was a solemn moment. Although not ushered in by the glad pealing of the bells, the wind, which knows nothing of the change of centuries, nevertheless sang a funeral dirge to the crashing of its own organ notes. On the 1st of January, 1901, the tempest still raged with unabated energy, inexhaustible cascades of wind being

Our Mongol Guides when Returning to Anambaruin-gol.

poured through the rugged defile. We got our first glimpse of the stupendous mountain-mass of Anambaruin-ula across a low saddle, by which the river Anambaruin-gol broke through the Astyn-tagh, to enter the sandy desert, where it speedily died away. This region was, we knew, often visited by Mongols, especially in the summer. Hence, no sooner did we catch sight of a solitary horse grazing in the distance than we jumped to the conclusion that we should soon be in touch with these people; and yet, even whilst we were pitching our tents in an expansion of the glen by which the river emerged, we noticed that the animal regarded us in a shy sort of way. Next day I sent off small parties of the men in different directions in search of the Mongols; but they all returned without finding them. Evidently it was a long time since they had visited that locality. This was a stroke through our reckoning, for we had counted upon gleaning a good deal of information from their knowledge of the local topography. Still, as we had plenty of time, I decided to keep steadily on until we did find them, although it would mean a detour of nearly 200 miles—in fact, it meant making a complete circuit of the Anambaruin-ula.

Thinking it would be a pleasant surprise for the first Mongols we met, we went out to catch the horse that had escaped from them; but it proved a very much harder task than we had anticipated. We tried to lassoo him; we tried to drive him into a corner. But it wouldn't do; he took to his heels, and galloped up the valley. He had grown as wild and as shy as a kulan.

CHAPTER IV.

AMONGST THE SÄRTÄNG MONGOLS.

FOR several days after this we travelled due east. The first day took us up a magnificent gorge, deeply trenched between naked walls of rock, at the bottom of which the Anambaruin-gol lay bound in fetters of ice, blue, shimmering, slippery. Our path was rendered difficult by reason of the masses of rock and débris which had plunged down the mountains on each side. A few solitary stone huts proved that the glen was occasionally visited by Mongols. We stopped below the pass which fenced in the gorge on the east. Just as we were pulling up, a flock of arkharis, or wild sheep, scrambled with the agility and sureness of monkeys up the crags beside the path. But, when they stopped to regard the caravan, Shagdur crept in underneath them. A shot awoke the sleeping echoes of the glen, and down crashed a big ram from a height of 160 feet or so. If these wild sheep chance to slip or slide along their craggy pathways, they are said always to fall on their horns; and certainly Shagdur's victim proved the truth of the observation, for he came down on his horns amongst the rattling gravel. We had had a long march, and there was a good deal to do when we stopped, so that it was midnight before the men came in, bringing the arkhari on a camel.

It turned out a frightfully cold night, namely, −28°.5 C., or −19°.3 Fahr. With the sky clear and the moon shining bright and high above the snowfields on the mountain flanks, we almost fancied we could actually see the cold vibrating in the night air. Next day we crossed another pass, and reached a part from which numerous streams descend in the summer southwards to the sandy basin of Tsaidam. In one place we caught, between two detached groups of mountains, a glimpse of that desert. The snow formed one unbroken expanse all around us. A party

Our Camp in the Glen of Jong-duntsa.

of Mongols had recently been there—the ashes of their camp-fires were still lying amongst the stones.

On we went through that wild mountain region, fighting against the wind, suffering from the cold, for we had no fuel, except what we obtained by the sacrifice of our pack-saddles. Nor were the camels any better off than we were; for, not only was the pasture scanty, it was also of miserable quality, and springs of water were few and far between. It does no harm to camels to go several days without water, but horses must have it. Ours, for want of anything better, nibbled at the snow as they passed along. When it dawned on the 6th of January, the mountain-mass of the Anambaruin-ula lay on our left, and

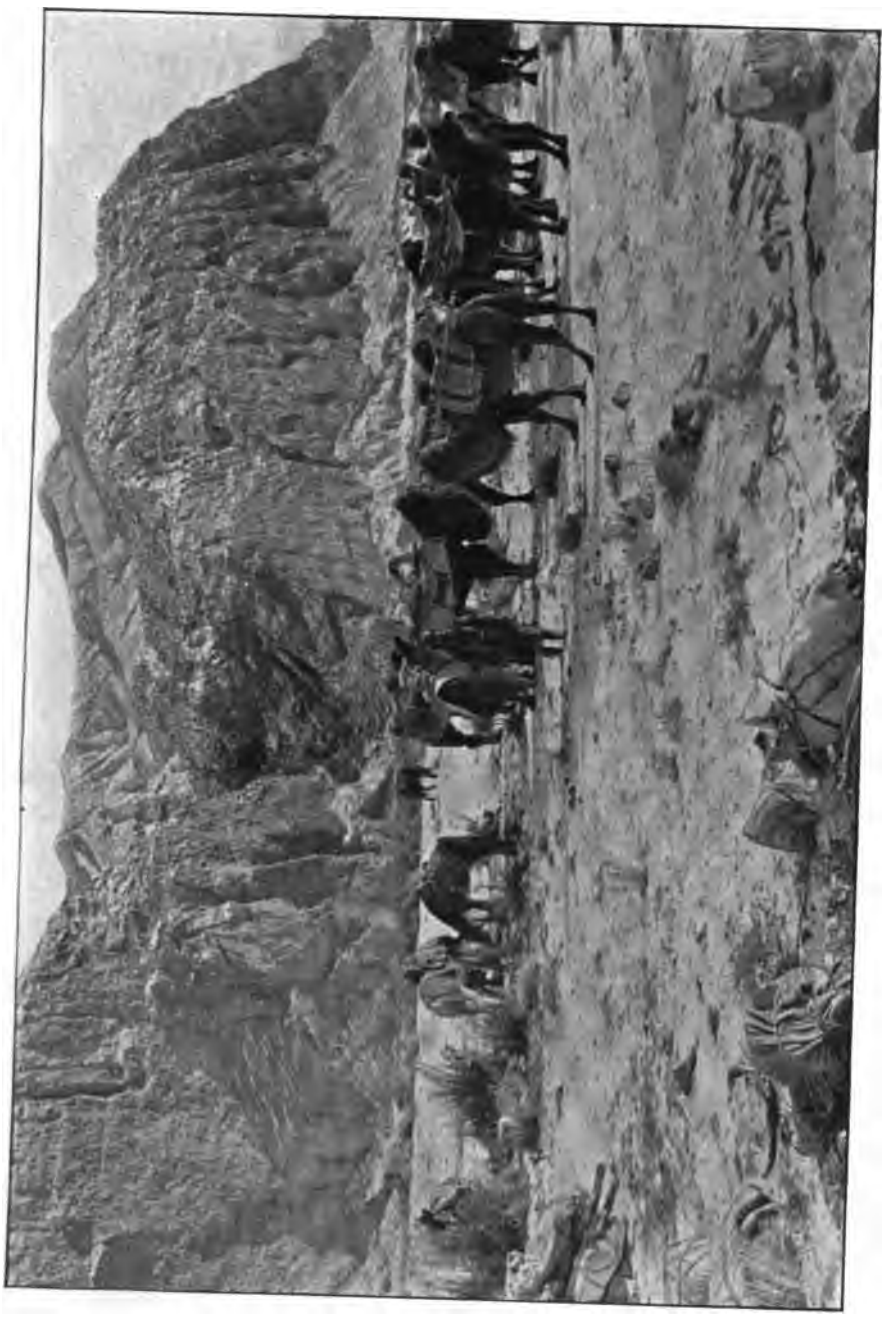
Up the Gorge of the Anambaruin-gol.

on our right, that is, to the south and south-east, stretched open table-lands, while before us lay the highland basin of Särtäng, inhabited by the Särtäng Mongols, who are tribally akin to the inhabitants of Tsaidam. Still farther to the east we caught glimpses of the little lake of Bulunghir-nor, and of the streams which fed it. The excellent grazing for which these table-lands were famous was pretty certain to be withered; still, such as it was, we resolved that our animals should have their fill of it. Although it was already twilight, we determined to make an effort to reach the pasture-grounds that night. In the distance we observed some black dots, which we took to be huts and herds, though they were too far away for us to make them out

distinctly, and very soon the landscape was wrapt in darkness. Then Shagdur and Mollah galloped on ahead, and about an hour later we saw a fire flaring up through the night. This was a signal that they had reached the edge of the steppe. However, owing to the slow pace at which the caravan travelled, it took us a good two hours to get up to them ; but, once there, the animals were turned loose to graze all night : there was no fear of them running away from a spot like that.

Before I was called the next morning, the men had already hunted out two or three Mongol encampments farther on. Accordingly, making for them, we came first upon three yurts, with large numbers of cattle, horses, and sheep grazing in the vicinity. An old woman came running to meet us, without showing the least trace of fear ; indeed, all the time she was talking to us, she went on with the work she was about—namely, plaiting a cord. But she begged us not to stop there, for all the men were absent. Accordingly, we proceeded towards three other yurts, from which two men came forward and welcomed us, and said that we might pitch our tents beside theirs. We were quite at home amongst these friendly Mongols of Sando, as the place was called. They readily sold us what provisions we wanted, but, unfortunately, they had no caravan animals to spare. As a matter of fact, the district was very thinly inhabited; there were but a few yurts altogether, and quite recently one big caravan had started for the temple of Kumbum in Kan-su, and another for Sa-chow. However, what Mongols there were soon came to visit us. This gave me an opportunity to freshen up the Mongolian I learnt during my former journey, although I already had an excellent interpreter in Shagdur—in fact, Mongolian was his mother-tongue.

After a few days' welcome and agreeable rest, during which, however, the temperature went down to $-32°.5$ C., or $-26°.5$ Fahr., we started to return to Anambaruin-gol, but now on the north side of the mountain-mass. The next four days were spent in crossing this, the eastward prolongation of the Astyn-tagh. Our first station was Bulunghir-nor, where the wolves howled all night. The principal pass, Sho-ovo, or the " Little Obo," was a sharp-cut lintel or crest, extraordinarily steep on its northern face ; indeed we were obliged to lead the camels down one by one, lest they should topple headlong down the precipice. The transverse glen beside us was evidently traversed in summer by a large river, which had left behind it unmistakable evidences



Our Camels at Jong-duntsa.

of its excavating energy. Partridges were very plentiful; and although we had an abundant supply of mutton, I lived upon nothing but game throughout the whole of the Anambar-ula expedition.

From the little *aul* or "tent-village" of Sho-ovo, at the northern foot of the mountain, we directed our course to the west, although we were only a single day's journey from the large town of Sa-chow on Tung-khuan, called by the Mussulmans Dung-khan. It was probably fortunate that we did not visit that city whilst the disturbances were in progress in China, for of these we were quite ignorant. Tung-khuan is interesting as the definitive termination of the important journey which Count Béla Széchenyi made in company with two others, MM. Lóczy and Kreitner, in 1877-80. Our guide was a nice old Mongol, who knew the country intimately; he let me hire from him five camels as far as Anambaruin-gol, and sold me as much corn as we were able to carry with us. The surface was covered with snow, yet not sufficiently to prevent the animals from grazing; it was also grooved by an infinite number of trenches and ravines, some of them as much as 35 feet deep, and all of them deeply scarped. The second station was called Davato. There a most trying wind blew straight down out of the mountains. It appeared to be a sort of local *föhn*, for it ceased the next day immediately we crossed over a low secondary pass, and so long as we felt its influence it raised the temperature to — 16°.0 C., or — 3°.2 Fahr.

On the 18th of January we approached the gorge of Jongduntsa, a very broad trench scooped through thick beds of boulder clay to the depth of some 160 feet. A countless number of similar deep trenches radiated northwards from the mountain-mass of Anambaruin-ula, until they gradually converged into a smaller number of water-courses, which penetrated the desert, and eventually disappeared in the sand. The only way by which we could get down into the gorge just mentioned was by a little side ravine. The gorge itself was like a gigantic railway cutting, with perpendicular sides driven through the gravel-and-shingle, and echoed like a corridor. It was pretty steep, and grew narrower and darker as we advanced; but upon turning a projecting angle, it opened out into a sunny glen, clothed with vegetation, and traversed by a now ice-bound river. We encamped on the left bank of the latter amid scenery which was at once fantastic and sublime. On both sides were the lofty

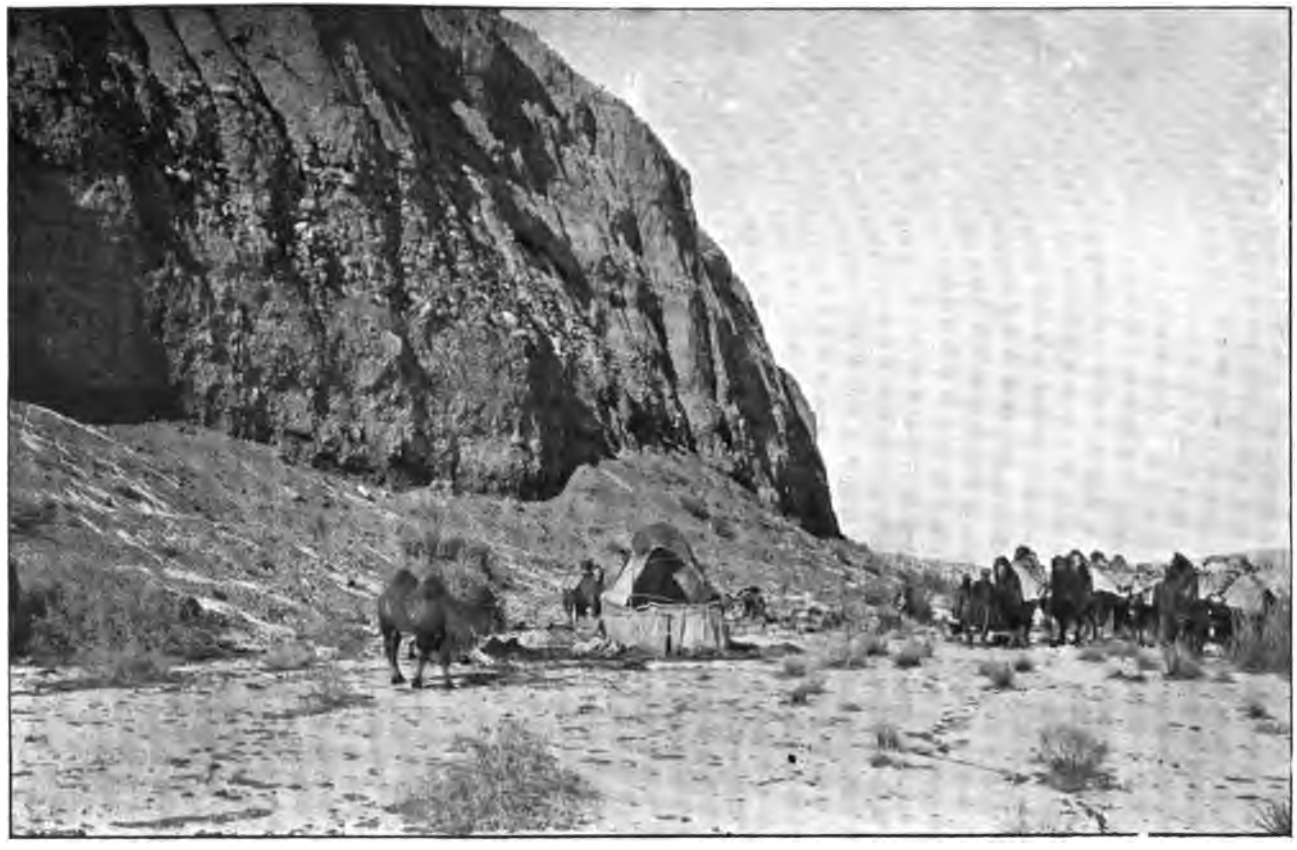
vertical walls of gravel-and-shingle, with their sharply accentuated lights and shades, and black, gaping portals, that is to say, the mouths of the side glens which opened out upon the main

Stone huts at Lu-chuentsa.

One of our Mongol Guides.

glen. On the south was a chaos of wild, snow-capped mountain peaks.

The lower extremities of the glens which streamed down



Looking North from Jong-duntsa.

from the stupendous mass of Anambaruin-ula were in truth both grand and charming. In one of them, called Lu-chuentsa, there was a grove of small willows surrounding big sheets of ice, and themselves encircled by belts of excellent grass ; while stone huts and cornfields showed that Mongols had dwelt there not very long before. On the other hand the country was all the more difficult to travel in, owing to the gigantic ravines just mentioned, and the countless number of small gulleys which ran into them. These with their vertical sides made, as it were, a choppy sea of detritus very picturesque, but difficult to traverse. Often the caravan, dipping down into one of these huge trenches,

The Mouth of the Ravine of Jong-duntsa.

became quite lost to sight, until it began to climb up again on the opposite side.

The wild camel was very common in the neighbourhood of Gashun-gol. We frequently saw troops of 15 to 20 individuals, sometimes on the right of our march, that is to say, on the outermost slopes of the mountain next the desert, sometimes, strange to say, well inside the higher valleys on our left, where one would think they ran a risk of being driven into a *cul-de-sac*.

Leaving Gashun-gol on the 24th January, we travelled the remainder of the way to Khan-ambal, where we encamped on the same spot that we occupied three weeks before. Close to this place we encountered the only caravan we met during the whole of the four months this expedition lasted—namely, two

Chinese with ten camels laden with dry and frozen fish for Sachow. They told me they came from Lovo-nur, that is, Lop-nor. I wanted to buy a parcel or two of their fish, but they stubbornly refused to sell me any. My men proposed that we should simply help ourselves to what we wanted, but I objected to use violence, and let the Chinamen go on their way unmolested.

In thus returning to Camp no. CXXXI., that is counting from Abdall, we had made the complete circuit of the Anambaruin-ula ; and yet we had not attained the object for which the detour was deliberately undertaken. We had procured no camels, we had not even bought a single horse. All we had done was to tax the strength of our own animals to no profit. The camels, it is true, were still in good condition ; but several of the horses already showed signs of exhaustion. And yet the expedition had not been altogether wasted ; we had traversed a region which, from the geographical point of view, was one of singular interest.

As we still had vast stretches of unknown country before us, I thought it advisable to make a change in the caravan before we started again. In the first place, we weeded out half-a-dozen horses, which did not seem strong enough to stand another two months of hard work, and then put aside as much of our baggage as we could conveniently spare, and such as was no longer necessary, *e.g.*, skeletons of animals and geological specimens, and thus made up a little caravan, which Tokta Ahun and Ahmed were to conduct back to Abdall. I also gave the first-named another commission, namely, to continue with the horses as far as Charkhlik, and there obtain from Cherdon and Islam Bai a number of stores which we should subsequently want. With these he was to return to Abdall, and there await our arrival, bringing with him at the same time the post-jighit who, according to my arrangement with Consul-General Petrovsky in Kashgar, ought in the meantime to have arrived at Charkhlik. Each jighit had been strictly ordered to deliver his post-bag into my own hands with the seals unbroken. After that, Tokta Ahun was to take three fresh horses, and travel along the northern shore of Kara-Koshun, a good three days' journey from Kum-chappgan, and then in some suitable locality make a permanent camp. At the same time he was to take with him some of the fishermen of the neighbourhood, with two canoes. Next they were to build a hut, and lay in a supply of fish and wild-duck, so that when we came in from the desert, we might

Our Camp at Lu-chuentsa.

find both shelter and good food after our privations. They were to be at their rendezvous not later than 45 days after the 27th of January; and as soon as ever they arrived there, they were to find out a hill that was visible for a long distance to the north, and on the top of it light a big signal-fire twice every day—at noon and again as soon as it was dark, and so continue until we arrived. Tokta Ahun did not like leaving us; but I consoled him by telling him that if he executed his task well he should be handsomely rewarded.

Having sent off the little caravan to Abdall, we started on the 27th of January to cross the Desert of Gobi, from south to north. In the beginning we followed the glen which the Anambaruin-gol had carved through the Astyn-tagh. In a bend of the stream we came across three stone huts, surrounded by patches of cultivated ground, belonging to the Mongols. But the glen soon widened out, the mountains on each side of it forming detached groups, low hills, and swellings, which finally merged in the desert. At the same time the river dwindled, until eventually it became a mere trickling rill, while its enclosing terraces grew lower, and its patches of ice thinner. The snow also became less frequent as we advanced. Upon reaching the last patches of ice, we made a critical pause. When should we next find water? We did not know—we had no means of knowing. I therefore ordered the men to break the ice, and fill five sacks as full as they would hold. This would keep us supplied for ten days—that is to say, one sack was considered sufficient for men and horses for a period of 48 hours.

In proportion as we travelled away from the mountain-chain, the details of its conformation grew fainter; but, on the other hand, the two main ridges began to stand out with increasing distinctness. The more distant, which the Mongols called Tsagan-ula, or the White Mountain, lifted its magnificently modelled, snow-capped crest with imposing and majestic grandeur to a lofty height; but the nearer range to the north, that which was pierced by the Anambaruin-gol, was black, and drawn in soberer, modester outlines.

But both the scenery and the surface now underwent a total change. The gravelly débris, over which we had struggled for a month past, thinned away, until it disappeared, and the ground became soft; at the same time by riding round the patches of snow, we were able to spare the horses the disagreeable balling of the snow under their feet. At intervals the steppe vege-

tation, consisting of teresken and tamarisks, was really luxuriant. To the north the view of the desert "ocean" was as yet cut off by a low, reddish-coloured mountain. We found a suitable stopping-place beside a little hill, where the dry clumps of vegetation furnished not only food for the camels, but materials for firing; while a lingering snow-drift in a crevice close by enabled us to husband still longer our stock of ice.

The next day a gale sprang up from the west, driving before it the cold, grey, heavy clouds, and carrying in its arms an immense quantity of dust. The gigantic barrier of the Astyn-tagh was obscured by the clouds, and only the extreme edges of the low desert range were visible through the dust-haze. Following the dry river-bed we gradually approached the foot of the nearer desert range. The steppe vegetation, still in places plentiful, consisted of the berry-bearing bushes and scrub akin to the ordinary tamarisk, which the Mussulmans call *chakkandeh* and *köuruk*. Some of these were withered, and so made excellent fuel. Soon we came to a broad but shallow river-course running towards the west-north-west, in the direction of the Lop-nor basin, the common termination of all the water-channels in the vicinity, both those that came down from the Astyn-tagh and those that flowed out of the desert range. Crossing this big water-course we scrambled up the opposite side, which was rather steep, and soon came to the low pass that led over the red and grey granite of the desert range. Over on the other side of it we put up our tents amongst the low, dry sand-dunes, which had drifted up against its northern foot. Below the pass *suk-suk* or *saksaul* (*Anabasis Ammodendron*) made its appearance for the first time.

During the 29th January, whilst threading our way through a chaos of insignificant hills, we came upon an ancient, but unmistakable, highway; though there was no trace of it whatever on the surface, it was obliterated ages ago. Every hill, however, and every headland—there were at least a score of them—was crowned with a cairn of stones by way of landmark. As a rule they consisted of two flat stones, one large and the other small, propped one against the other; but sometimes of a square stone supporting two round ones, one on the top of the other. These cairns could not possibly indicate a hunter's track, for hunters neither follow fixed routes, nor do they build landmarks of stones such as these were. It was probably a continuation of the road we had formerly seen in the Astyn-

The Caravan on the Ice at Lu-chuentsa.

tagh, and had undoubtedly been used by pilgrims, though it must have been many ages ago; for the cairns were beyond all question very old. The stones could not have been affected by anything except weathering; it would have been impossible for any storm to have worn them down in the way they were, or to have displaced them from their positions.

One more pass and there was the yellow desert stretching out before us, its ridged dunes looking weird and repellent. We halted in the throat of the last glen on the coast as it were of the desert "ocean." Here the saksaul grew very luxuriantly, attaining a height of over ten feet.

The extreme outliers, which embraced this glen between them, were half buried in sand, for the dunes climbed half way over them, and they themselves dipped down to an unascertained depth under the desert waves. It was evident that this elevated tract on the edge of the desert was sometimes visited by rain, for there were a number of dry rivulets winding in and out amongst the sand-dunes, until finally they united to form a dry channel, which gave signs of carrying at times a considerable volume of water. First it ran towards the east; then, striking against a sandy hill, turned to the north. Then again, it went towards the west, until it was once more deflected at a sharp angle towards the desert by another lofty dune. It was amazing to find that the downfall here was strong enough to contend successfully with the sand. Anyway, without this natural "road," we should have experienced considerable difficulty in making our way through the belt of formidable drift-sand.

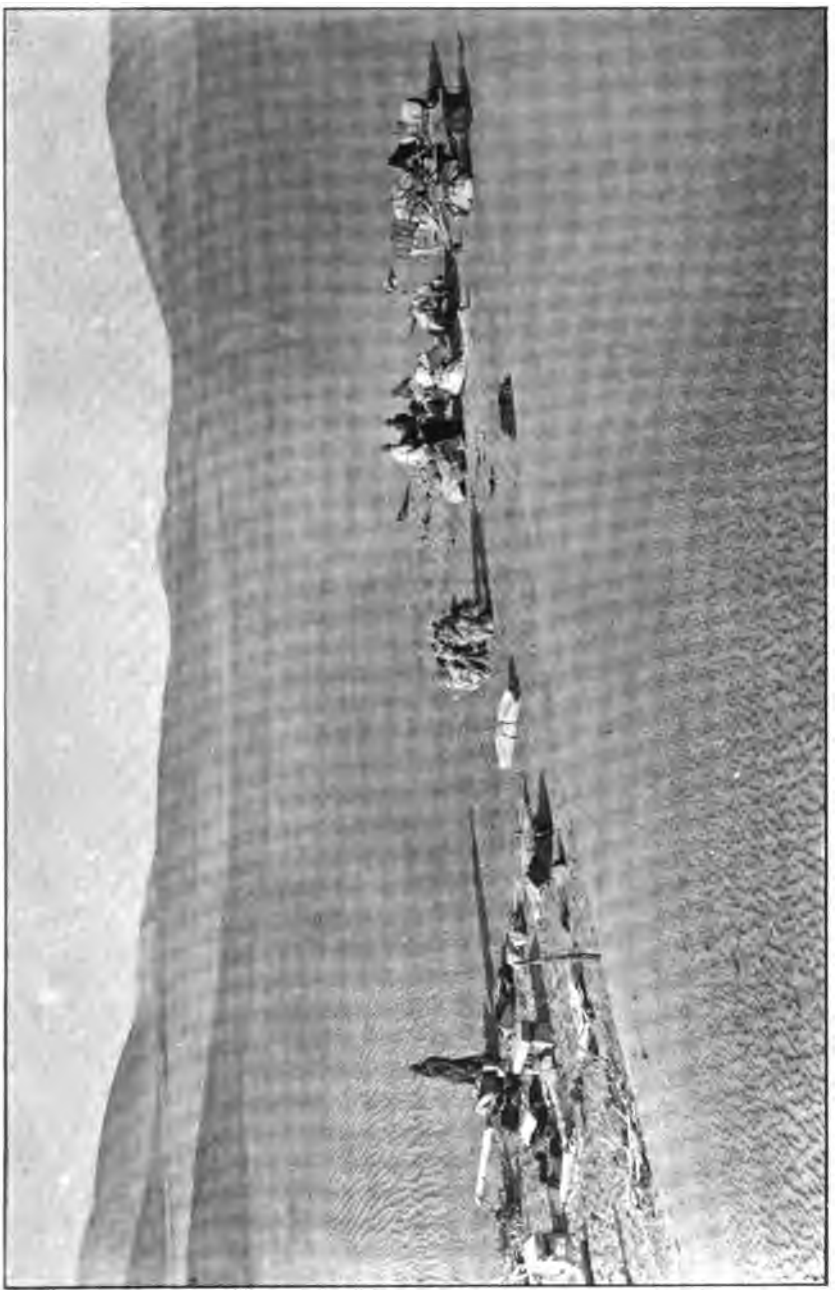
Owing to the icy wind I preferred to walk all day and serve as guide, the post I usually filled when our march lay across the desert. Yesterday the tracks of the wild camels and antelopes were exceedingly numerous; to-day they entirely ceased. The saksaul only survived in an occasional plant half buried under the sand. In places pieces of granite as big as a man's head were lying on the sand at a distance of several miles from the foot of the mountains. How did they get there? Why were not they too buried under the drift-sand? I could only account for it by the direction the wind took. They looked wonderfully like pieces of wood floating on water.

Gradually the water-course became less distinctly marked, and the sand invaded it in several places. The sand-dunes were now nothing like so high as they were at the foot of the mountains. The little desert range, which we had twice crossed,

acted as a sort of breakwater, and not only prevented the drift-sand from travelling farther to the south, but also protected the belt of steppe which lay along the northern foot of the Astyntagh. At length the water-course terminated amongst the dunes in an expansion which resembled a small lake, although now absolutely dry. Here sacksaul bushes grew very luxuriantly. The little depression was bounded on the north by a steep sand-dune, and beyond it stretched the real "ocean" of the desert in all its stupendous desolation, though locally differing in no respect from several other regions in which I had crossed the Desert of Gobi. Its boundary was drawn with marvellous sharpness: not a single plant crossed the line. East, north, west—nothing but sand—sand—sand! That day we encamped in the middle of the desert.

Next day the dunes gradually decreased in height, and eventually were succeeded by the underlying clay, disposed in a succession of terraces that looked towards the north. On the 1st of February this formation became still more developed, the terraces pointing like fingers towards the north-north-east, and presenting vertical faces of as much as 170 feet in height. A keen wind shrouded the desert in clouds of dust, so that we were unable to see more than a mile ahead. Towards evening we experienced a very pleasant surprise in another belt of steppe, where kamish and tamarisks grew luxuriantly, and the tracks of wild camels, antelopes, and wolves were very numerous. We dug a well, and at a depth of 3¾ feet obtained saltish drinking water; but it trickled so slowly out of the sand that it did little more than whet the camels' appetite for more. This belt of steppe-land lasted for a whole day. We followed the wild camels' tracks that led across it towards the north, passing an occasional clump of venerable and ragged poplars, all, however, withered, with the exception of one, in which there was just a spark of life.

At Camp no. CXXXVIII. on the edge of this steppe-land we had everything we wanted, and thoroughly enjoyed two days of much-needed rest. Whilst I took an observation of the sun, the men baked bread, and had a big wash, for we were staying beside an especially copious well. The camels had a thorough good drink, each swallowing about seven bucketsful. The water was almost perfectly fresh, and by pouring it out into a little pool, and letting it freeze, we were able to secure a fresh stock of ice.



Our Camp in the Middle of the Sandy Desert.

Beyond this belt of steppe-land we again plunged into the desert. Here the clay was carved and sculptured by the wind into cubes, pyramids, and obelisks, some of them more than 25 feet high, and often bearing a confusing likeness to the ruins of houses and town walls. That evening we struck the *astin-yol*, or "lower caravan road," leading from Abdall to Sa-chow. Here Mollah's topographical knowledge came into play, for on two or three occasions he had travelled that road with caravans, and knew where all the wells were situated and their names. It was

Watering the Camels at Camp no. CXXXVIII.

beside one of these, Achik-kuduk, or the "Salt Well," that we pitched our tents; and well it deserved its name, for the camels positively refused to touch the water it yielded. The moist saliferous ground around the well showed, that not long ago a caravan had passed that way from Abdall to Sa-chow. It was no doubt laden with fish, a food upon which the Chinese set great store. Amongst the footprints we recognised the foot-gear of both Mohammedans and Chinese.

This desert route had been already traversed by M. Kozloff and M. Bonin, and possibly also by Marco Polo. It had been my intention simply to cross it on my way north; but prudence dictated that it would not be wise to enter upon an absolutely unknown stretch of country without a sufficient supply of ice.

Mollah told me that the next well to the west, Tograk-kuduk, or the "Poplar Well," yielded good water. Accordingly we proceeded thither, and rested a day beside it; and, as the thermometer went down to −27°.5 C., or −17°.5 Fahr. during the night, and the next day was only two or three degrees higher, we experienced no difficulty in filling our sacks. Thus when, on the 8th of February, we began our long and extremely risky journey towards the north, we carried with us sufficient ice to last men and horses for ten days. The camels drank as much

Sand-dunes of the Middle Gobi.

as they could hold at the well before starting, and they had also done full justice to the kamish beds.

We now bent our steps through the dry yellow reeds, which rustled and snapped in the intense cold, towards a region about which we possessed absolutely no knowledge whatever either from European or Asiatic sources. I, as usual, led the way. The tracks of wild camels and antelopes ran in endless number in every direction; but there were no signs of kulans—the atmosphere was doubtless too heavy for their spacious chests. All of a sudden the vegetation came to an end, amid a labyrinth of clay mounds, each crowned with a dead tamarisk. Upon reaching a depression where the ground looked damp, I thought it might pay to dig a well, especially as we had in front of us a terrace some 230 feet in height, resembling a gigantic ornamental

The Terrace seen from the Last of the Oases.

frieze. The grazing was good, and I thought it a pity not to let the camels have a good feed. We dug our well; it gave tolerably good water. As for the bitter cold—we did not mind it much after we got our rousing big fires made.

Next day we penetrated the clay terrace by a cleft or glen, which we followed till nightfall, and which had a scarce perceptible ascent. Now, according to the existing maps of the centre of Asia, there ought to have been a considerable mountain-range across our path; but such elevations as we saw were so insignificant as scarcely to deserve the name of mountains at all. Here, in a little cranny, I found fragments of a very ancient iron cooking-pot, of a spherical form, and a tripod with a ring hanging from it. Chinese or Mongols had clearly visited the spot at some time or other. Was this, perchance, a further continuation of the road which we had seen in the Astyn-tagh, or did it indicate some ancient route to Khami? That we were in a region where anciently means of communication did exist was proved beyond a shadow of doubt next day. We were following a broad depression, which led straight north, and all alongside it was a string of cairns and landmarks of stone. Finally, in a flat undulating expansion of the valley, the old road bifurcated, one branch going west-south-west, the other north-west. The former led, no doubt, to the ruins which we had previously discovered on the northern shore of the old Lop-nor basin; the other, which we now followed, appeared to lead to Turfan. The track soon took us over a low ridge of reddish, weather-worn granite. Beyond it our view was obstructed by a somewhat higher range in the far distance. The country was strangely silent, desolate, and deserted. As the traces of man were here of great antiquity, and only survived in the landmarks of stone, so also the mountain-ranges themselves were on the point of disappearing off the face of the earth. After the stupendous mountains of Tibet, I almost doubted the propriety of applying the term "mountains" to these comparatively low swellings. In point of fact they were the crumbling remains of primitive foldings of the earth's surface, which are now being broken down bit by bit under the influence of the atmosphere.

In a sheltered nook on the north side of the range we discovered a snow-drift, which came in very opportunely for the camels. Perhaps it actually saved them from perishing of thirst, for, as it turned out, we had a very long way to travel before we came to water again.

CHAPTER V.

SEARCHING FOR WATER IN AN UNKNOWN COUNTRY.

WE now began to observe the first premonitions of spring. The winds were not quite so bitingly cold as they had been. The temperature seldom dropped below −20°.0 C., or −4°.0 Fahr. And it was indeed time that our long winter did come to an end, for it had begun in July of the previous year, and had continued ever since without a break.

On the 11th of February we crossed a swelling that was relatively insignificant in height, though the pass which led over it was exceptionally difficult. Here the tracks of the wild camels were extraordinarily numerous, and many of them appeared to lead to the snow-drift which we had just left. But on the 12th we traversed, north-north-east, an unspeakably desolate country, where there was scarcely a wild camel's footprint to be found. The prospect was open in every direction, though low scattered hills shut in the horizon, and for some time it was impossible to tell in which direction the contour fell. The surface was, it is true, seamed with shallow, winding water-channels; but they were all as dry as tinder, and most of them looked as if they had not contained a drop of water for dozens of years. On the 13th, as no change took place, and the hope of discovering springs or snow appeared to be desperate, we once more changed our course back to the north-west and west. The going was now capital, and we thought 18 miles by no means a long day's march. At 1 p.m. the temperature went up to 4.°5 C., or 40.°1 Fahr.

The two following days we turned south-west, steering by the compass direct for Altimish-bulak. After the détour we had made to the north-east, our position was now become critical. We still carried with us a sufficient supply of ice to last men and horses for several days, but we could not afford

Shagdur and Khodai Kullu Digging a Well at the Last Oasis. In the Background the Extreme Outlier of the Kurruk-tagh towards the Desert of Gobi.

a single drop for the camels, and all our efforts were now directed towards the necessity of saving those untiring veterans. I began to enter on my map every wild camel track we came across, for I thought that the directions in which they ran would afford some clue as to the whereabouts of springs and grazing. Most of the tracks, I soon ascertained, ran towards the north-west or south-east. In the latter direction were the kamish steppes of the astyn-yoll which we had recently crossed; in the former there were no doubt springs which the camels knew of, and they only. I now spent most of my time walking, for when things begin to look serious I have no longer patience to ride. The camels remained immovably calm and patient, and lay perfectly still all night. But then there was not a blade of grass to be obtained in this unspeakably sterile region. All we had to give them was a little of the corn we had bought from the Mongols.

On the 16th of February I was forced to the conclusion that the only way to avoid disaster was to strike straight for the south, and try to reach once more the salt wells of the astyn-yoll. We were engaged in an exciting hunt for water, and in vain did we look and strain our eyes for a single surviving snow-drift. No, there was nothing else for it; we must go down to lower ground where we could at least try to dig a well. Upon climbing to the top of a pass in an insignificant range the view I obtained was anything but encouraging. Low swellings in every direction—the same moon-like landscape as heretofore—the same arid hills, without a trace of grass, or any other indication of moisture.

In a broad watercourse close by I perceived the fresh tracks of no less than 57 wild camels. They radiated inwards from every direction until they converged into a single main track. A little bit further on we counted 30 other tracks, all uniting with the same highway. We stopped and called a council of war. That these numerous tracks all led to a spring nobody doubted for one moment; but the question was, how far off was it? Perhaps several long days' marches? Would it not be better, then, to keep straight on to Altimish-bulak, the position of which we did at least know? Finally, we decided to ignore the tracks, tempting though it was to follow them; for, though they had been quite recently made, strange to say there was not a glimpse of the camels themselves to be seen anywhere about. The principal track led towards the north, perhaps towards Pavan-bulak, a spring which Abdu Rehim told me the

year before he knew of by hearsay, though he had never visited it.

On the 17th of February our position began to look most serious. It was ten days since the camels had had anything to drink, if we except the few mouthfuls of snow they picked up a week ago. Their strength would not hold out for ever. During the course of the day we passed successively the two desert ranges which we had crossed over on our way north. They ran towards the west, and both alike disappeared in the sand, and consequently could not be directly connected with the Kurruk-tagh, although they belonged to the same orographical system. We saw the chains of the Kurruk-tagh a long way to the west, but they were higher and altogether bigger than these. As there was far greater likelihood of our finding water near them than in the desert, we decided to make for them. Turning my back on the outliers of the mountains, I soon reached the level plain, composed of saliferous clay, but diversified by ridges and swellings not more than six feet in height. The desert was perfectly open both south-west and north-east, and resembled the long, narrow bay of an ancient sea. After tramping for five hours, I stopped to wait for the caravan. The country now changed, and became worse than any sandy desert I ever traversed. It consisted of *yardangs*, or "clay ridges," like those which I have described in an earlier chapter, only here they were 20 feet high and 30 to 40 feet across the top. North and south they stretched in endless succession. Had it not been for the small gaps broken through them, we could not possibly have progressed, for their sides were perfectly perpendicular. An advance of ten or a dozen yards sometimes necessitated a sweep round of a furlong or even of a quarter of a mile. At length, however, I succeeded in finding a way out of the wearisome labyrinth, and we halted amongst low, flat hills, absolutely destitute of every trace of organic life.

Next morning, when the Cossacks came to call me, I seemed to have had a precious short sleep, for I had been desperately tired the night before when I turned in. At daybreak there was already a half gale blowing; and on towards the afternoon it quickened into a regular *kara-buran* (black tempest). The surface was abominable; we crossed one low ridge after another, up and down, up and down, and all at right angles. I was still leading the way, and trudged on for over a score of miles. Our fuel was exhausted some time previously—

The Caravan Marching through the Desert of Gobi.

[VOL. II.—*To face p.* 94.

we had not a splinter left. We were in a veritable rat-trap—stones, gravel, and sand—these and nothing else! The mountain-range for which I was making, and at the foot of which I hoped to find a spring, seemed to recede as if in mockery when I approached it, until at last it vanished altogether in the dust-haze. It grew afternoon, and our goal seemed further off than ever. In spite of the forced march, our camels were keeping up magnificently, despite the fact that they had not a blade to eat or a drop to drink; they nevertheless marched steadily on with a long, swinging stride and head aloft. The wild camels' tracks were now all directed towards the north-east, evidently making for the mysterious spring which we no doubt left behind us a few days ago.

It grew dark. We encamped in an open gulley, with no shelter whatever against the storm. My yurt was covered with a triple layer of felts, but I could not have the stove lighted for want of fuel. The only sources of warmth were my own body, my faithful travelling companion, Yolldash, and a flickering candle which would keep going out in the gusts of wind. The men banked up the sand all round the lower edge of the yurt, but in spite of that, its interior was like a cellar. Our ice was all done except a few small fragments. The unfortunate men had to content themselves with bread and a few fragments of ice for their supper, and then made haste to creep in underneath their sheep-skins. I managed to get a cup of tea, although at the sacrifice of one of the spars of the yurt.

The storm raged all night, but I slept well and peacefully. Next morning, the 19th of February, after a mug of tea and a piece of dry bread, off I started tramping again. Water! water! was the one thought uppermost in everybody's mind. Somewhere, somehow, we *must* find a spring, for it was now twelve days since the camels had touched a drop of water. Our situation was very serious indeed. If we failed to find water the camels would drop and die one after the other, just as they did in that awful march through the Takla-makan Desert. Here, however, we had certain advantages—the air was cold, and the ground hard and level, so that we were enabled to do long stages.

I was taking a bee-line for Altimish-bulak, the position of which I knew from our visit the spring of the year before. But according to what Abdu Rehim told me, there should be three springs somewhere to the east of Altimish-bulak; it

was upon them my hopes were fixed. And yet how easily they might lie hidden behind some slight swelling of the surface, or be screened by a low ridge. The storm, also, occasioned us great inconvenience, for it obscured the country, except in our immediate vicinity, to such an extent that the map which I had made the year before was of little use. When crossing the Takla-makan, we knew that if we kept advancing east we were bound the strike the Khotan-daria somewhere ; and again when travelling down the bed of the Keriya-daria, we had only to keep steadily to the north, and we were bound to strike the Tarim. In both these cases we were aiming to reach a line at right angles to our course ; but here we were aiming for fixed points, which we might only too readily miss in the dust-clouded atmosphere. If we did miss them, one thing was certain, we should never reach the marshes of the Tarim.

We studied with strained interest every wild-camel track we came across. Although obliterated on the loose sand, they were plain enough to see on the clay. We all knew that they led to water or from water, and that, if we followed them in one direction or the other, we were quite certain to reach a spring ; but then it might be days—it might be weeks—before we got to it. These tracks I was continually tempted to follow, and several times did follow them, until, without either rhyme or reason, they suddenly turned away at right angles. On the whole, they ran generally north and south. But in the former direction we were confronted by a reddish-brown mountain-barrier, while south there was nothing except the boundless waste of the desert. After all, it was best to keep pegging away west until we struck one or other of Abdu Rehim's springs.

Driving ahead for dear life, I soon left the caravan a long way behind. My native-made boots barely held together after the 180 miles tramp, and my feet were sore and blistered. Shagdur, who generally kept with me, and led my saddle horse, was nowhere to be seen. I had made up my mind that I would not stop until I did find water. That day (19th of February) was my 36th birthday, and I meant to have a pleasant surprise before it was over. The camel tracks were now more numerous, and they led towards the west. I seldom went two minutes without coming across one.

At last I reached a low ridge which forced me to turn to the south-west and south-south-west, and in the dry watercourse which skirted it I counted the footprints of no less than 30 wild

camels which had passed quite recently. A little bit further, and I observed a tamarisk, then the tracks of hares and antelopes. I stopped. These animals were not wont to travel a tremendous distance from water. Shagdur came up. We took counsel. There were several tamarisks to the south, and we made for them. The ground thereabouts was decidedly moist, although covered with a thick layer of salt. At length the caravan arrived, and we dug a well. The water was undrinkable; it contained a concentrated solution of salt. We again resumed our march. The storm, being now at our backs, helped us up the slopes, though down them we went rather

Altimish-bulak or Sixty Springs.

faster than we liked. I and Shagdur hurried on in advance, my white horse following me unbidden, like a dog. Yolldash was scouring the neighbourhood, hunting and sniffing everywhere. At length we got on the track of a troop of 20 wild camels, which brought us opposite to a glen or opening through the 10 to 15-foot clay terraces on the right, with the crest of the range showing four or five miles back at the head of the glen. All the camel tracks converged into one principal trail, which turned up the broad, trumpet-shaped glen. I followed it, and before I had gone ten minutes I saw Yolldash drinking beside a white patch of ice-water. We were saved!

The spring itself was, as usual, salt; but the sheet of ice, which was not more than 12 to 14 yards across, nor more than

four inches thick, was perfectly fresh. Strange to say, the only vegetation it supported consisted of two tamarisks. Shagdur was quite amazed when he saw the ice; he thought I must have had some secret knowledge of this hidden spring, seeing that I had marched straight to it. The cornice of the clay terrace on the left of the spring was crowned by a crescent-shaped wall, like a rampart or breast-work—evidently a hunter's ambush, for the spring was frequented by wild camels.

Here, I need hardly say, we encamped. Faisullah and Li Loyeh went up the glen to reconnoitre, and brought back each an armful of withered tussock grass, and with that the camels had to be content. We did not think it wise to let them touch the ice until they had recovered a little from the strain; but we let the horses try their teeth upon it at once. When the camels were at length watered it was quite a pleasure to give them small pieces of ice, which they crunched between their strong teeth like children eating sugar-candy. The weather still remained cold; but although at 1 p.m. the thermometer did not rise above freezing-point, the ink no longer froze in my pen, for I was now able to have the stove lighted again. The ice-sheet proved more enduring than we thought it would; for it more than supplied our wants, and when we started again on the 22nd of February we took several sacksful with us.

The scenery changed but little from day to day. It was terribly monotonous; the ground hard, often a good deal broken and furrowed by the watercourses all running out into the desert. The spurs of the Kurruk-tagu stuck out like short, truncated ribs. We now knew for certain that these ranges grew lower and more insignificant as they advanced towards the east, while at the same time the country became more sterile and the springs fewer, as well as more saline. Silence, desolation, and waste on every side! Absorbed in my own thoughts I mechanically followed another camel track, and it led me to a new spring, likewise with a conspicuous patch of ice about it. Upon this too all the camel tracks of the locality converged, as they had done in the case of the previous spring. Whilst our animals rested here a little to graze, I continued towards the south-west, and was threading some low hills when I caught sight of a handsome camel, which, however, did not observe me, owing to the wind blowing in the wrong direction for it. I stopped and waited

The Author Testing his Levelling Instruments at Altimish-bulak.

for the caravan, so as to give Shagdur a chance of a shot ; for not only were we in urgent want of fresh meat, but I was also anxious to get a complete skeleton and skin of a wild camel ; but the dogs put him to flight, and he escaped. At another similar oasis which I soon came to I observed no less than 18 camels grazing. But Shagdur, who came up at a run, was too hasty, and fired prematurely. Here, however, we found an abundance of everything we wanted—fodder, fuel, and water. This was the third of Abdu Rehim's springs, so that his information was perfectly reliable. According to my reckoning, Altimish-bulak ought to be about 17¼ miles from this oasis, in the direc-

The Wounded Wild Camel.

tion 60° west of south. Hence on the 24th of February I led the way towards it, though I was soon forced by a mountain-spur to keep a more westerly course. It was, I concluded, the range at the foot of which Altimish-bulak was situated. Had the atmosphere not been so obscured by dust, we ought to have seen it a pretty long way off. But my lucky star guided me right. I saw the yellow kamish glittering through the haze, and I also saw the outlines of five camels over the top of the thickets. Flinging off his cloak and cap, Shagdur crept stealthily towards them. I watched him through my field-glass. At the report of his rifle they moved off—at first slowly, but afterwards more swiftly. Their dark silhouettes flitted across the

kamish, and disappeared at the edge of the oasis. There were fourteen of them. After another shot Shagdur came to me and reported triumphantly that he had brought down two camels. One was a young she-camel, which I photographed as she stood ; after which we slaughtered her for food. The other was a big *bughra* (he-camel), which died instantaneously. His skeleton and skin eventually found their way to Stockholm. The Mussulmans were tremendously impressed by the fact that I succeeded in finding Altimish-bulak in the dust-haze. Our last day's march was 19¼ miles. Altogether I was less than two miles out of my reckoning, which, considering that my itinerary

The Dead Wild Camel.

extended over a total distance of 1,200 miles, was not so very bad. Here, then, I linked on my present series of astronomical and topographical observations with the series which I took the previous year. After that it ought not to be difficult to find the ruin we were come in quest of.

My yurt was put up between the same clumps of tamarisks and patches of kamish as the year before, and the camels and horses were turned out to graze. This had been quite a red-letter day.

We spent the remaining days of February beside the springs of Altimish-bulak. What cared we now for the never-tiring wind, or the never-lifting haze in which we were enveloped ?

We were encamped in a sheltered spot, and we had everything we needed. There was an inexhaustible supply of fuel, and I kept my stove going without cessation, except in the middle of the night. The Mussulmans found the young she-camel's meat first-rate eating.

One whole day was occupied in testing the levelling instruments, and in instructing the men who were to help me. We measured the circumference of the oasis, and the vertical error in that distance of 3,014 yards amounted to no more than a millimètre (0.0394 inch), a result which promised well for our great levelling across the desert, a line of more than fifty miles long.

Cleansing the Camel's Skeleton at Altimish-bulak.

Here is a little story about Khodai Kullu, who hitherto had not played any important part in the caravan. He was reputed to be a skilful hunter, and possessed a gun of his own ; but during the fourteen months he had been with us nobody had ever seen him use it. So far as we knew, he had not killed so much as a hare. The men came, therefore, to believe that he did not know how to shoot, and consequently it excited no surprise when one day he sold the weapon for a mere trifle to Li Loyeh, in whose hands it was just as harmless as in his own. But when Khodai Kullu got back to Yanghi-köll, he asserted that he had shot a camel at Altimish-bulak—as, indeed, he really had—and now that we were come to Altimish-bulak again, his comrades challenged

him to show them the skeleton of his victim. But Khodai Kullu prevaricated, and swore that the feat had been performed at some other spring in the neighbourhood. The others refused, however, to be put off in that way, and chaffed him unmercifully. Now, Khodai Kullu was a harmless, phlegmatic man, clumsy yet jovial, and with a very comical expression of countenance. One morning he disappeared from camp before sunrise, and the other men, who were busy most of the day cleaning the skeleton of the camel which Shagdur shot, had no idea where he had gone to, although they suspected he was out hunt-

Our Camp at Khodai Kullu's Spring.

ing, because one of the guns was missing. About dusk he came waddling back, and whilst still some distance away began to shout loudly in triumph. Anybody that liked might go with him, he said, and see the skeleton of the camel which he had shot the year before. The spring was now dry ; but the skeleton was there right enough beside it. Then he went on to relate how he had discovered another spring, with abundant vegetation, and a plentiful supply of ice. There he had surprised four camels, and shot a bughra. In consequence of this feat Khodai Kullu, whose face beamed like the rising sun with genial good nature, rose considerably in the estimation of his fellows, and they became heartily ashamed of themselves for having mistrusted him.

An Ice-Sheet below Khodai Kullu's Spring.

We decided to remove to the new spring which Khodai Kullu had discovered; it would be a more convenient as well as a nearer base for the operations we contemplated amongst the ruins of the desert. Next day, the 1st of March, was Khodai Kullu's great day. He marched along bravely at the head of the caravan, full of importance, singing his loudest, with an air of self-satisfied complacency, as if he were sovereign of all the deserts and oases, and of their inhabitants, the wild camels, whilst the rest of us followed meekly and submissively behind him.

After passing some small low greenstone hills, greatly

Khodai Kullu and his Wild Camel.

weathered, there, sure enough, was the oasis in front of us. But it was so well masked by the configuration of the ground that it would have been impossible to find it, had we not known where it was, or hit upon it by mere chance, as Khodai Kullu did. Khodai Kullu's victim lay a few hundred paces from the edge of the oasis. As is usual with the wild camel, upon being wounded it had tried to escape into the desert. It was a fat and handsome male, and his head lay turned towards the spot where the bullet had entered his body. As soon as his blood turned cold, the ticks, which were in his coat, hastily deserted him. It was now getting warm enough—15°.0 C., or 59°.0 Fahr. at noon—for these inconvenient Acarids to begin creeping about

the bushes and reeds. They frequent the borders of the small oases in vast numbers, and are carried from one oasis to another by the camels.

The water at the new spring bubbled up at a number of points, and fell into a deep trough; its temperature was 1.°7 C., or 35.°1 Fahr., and its specific gravity 1.0232. It was so salt that our camels would on no account touch it; but as the sun was now warm enough to melt the surface of the ice-cakes, we experienced no lack of fresh water. The ice was thick and clear, and we filled nine *tagars*, or "bags of reed," to take with us.

This oasis was, in fact, quite a God-send to us. It was, as I have said, 7½ miles nearer to the ruins, and as it afforded plenty of grazing, we were able to leave there all three horses, as well as three ailing camels, under the charge of Khodai Värdi, whilst we went in quest of the ruined village. For his own support we left with Khodai Värdi, out of our now terribly scanty stores, a matchbox, a small cooking-pot, and a handful of tea. He had plenty of water, and he could get what meat he liked from the dead camel; the matches would help him to make fires for boiling his tea and cooking his steak. As he told me afterwards, only one mishap befel him in his loneliness. The first morning, when he awoke, all three horses were gone. From their trail he saw that they had returned to Altimish-bulak, where there was better grazing. However, he fetched them back, and kept closer watch upon them in future.

On the 2nd of March I started with seven camels, carrying the whole of the baggage and nine sacks of ice. In some respects it would have been better to follow the route we took the previous year; for one thing it would have been easier to find the ruins. Three ancient cairns, or landmarks, showed that this little oasis was known to the people who once inhabited the region. Before we had advanced very far we came across traces of the northern margin of the desiccated lake. First we observed numerous fragments of earthenware; then dead tamarisks, standing on their own mounds on the tops of little hills; then brush-like stubble of ancient kamish-fields; and, finally, snail shells, in some places in vast quantities. Here we were, then, once more in the wind-sculptured clay desert.

VII.

The Ruined Towns of Lôu-lan.

A Vanished Country.

CHAPTER VI.

THE RUINS OF ANCIENT LOP-NOR.

THE morning of the 3rd of March was fresh and cool, and, thanks to the easterly wind, the heat during the day never grew oppressive. According to my survey, we had 8¾ miles to go to reach the ruins we were in search of. We travelled slowly, keeping a good look-out in every direction, so as not to miss them. Immediately on our left, Shagdur eventually lighted upon the remains of two houses. The one on the east was 21¼ feet square, and its walls, 3¼ feet thick, were built of square bricks or burnt clay. The other house was constructed of wood, now much decayed through lapse of time; still enough of it was left to show that it had been 85¼ feet long, and of the same breadth as the other house. In the bigger enclosure we discovered a small cannon-ball; an object shaped exactly like a rowlock, but made of copper; some Chinese coins; and two or three red earthenware cups.

A little bit further on, where my map indicated that we were quite close to the locality we were searching for, I stopped, and sent all the men off to explore the neighbourhood, except Faisullah, who stayed behind to look after the camels. They were absent several hours, and towards sunset I resolved to go and encamp at the foot of a clay tower, which stood about one hour east of the spot where we then were. But, owing to the steep and difficult ridges and yardangs which lay across our path, it was quite dusk when we reached the place. Having helped Faisullah to unload the camels, I took a rope and an axe, and climbed to the top of the tower. It was built round a framework of beams, branches, and kamish. On the top of it I lighted a fire as a beacon for the men.

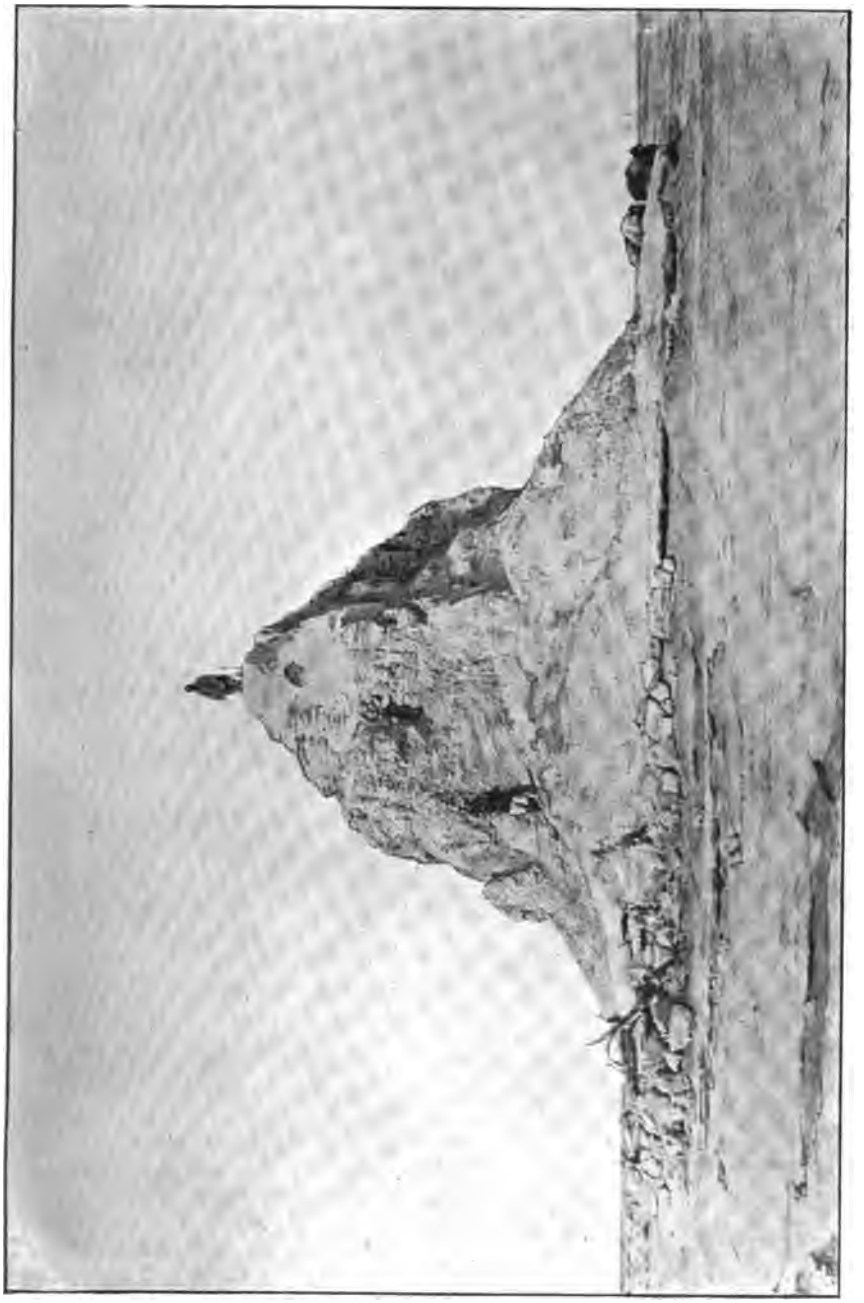
Thereupon they began to return, one by one. Two of them had discovered another high *tora* (clay tower), surrounded by

the ruins of several houses, and brought with them, as evidence of their discovery, some corn, a rusted cable chain, a copper lamp, coins, fragments of pottery, and a pitcher or jar. They recommended that we should make that our base of operations. Accordingly at sunrise next morning we went across to the new tora, and encamped on its south-west side, so as to obtain some sort of shelter if a storm should come on. We piled up the sacks of ice on a framework of timber under a clay terrace that leaned over towards the north.

As soon as the camels were sufficiently rested, they were to be led back to Khodai Kullu's oasis. This important task I entrusted to Li Loyeh, instructing him to spend the first night just where the ground began to slope up towards the mountains. The following day he was to go to the oasis, and was to stay there two days; and then, having loaded up all the animals with ice, was to take two more days to return to us. This left us deprived of all means of transport, and allowed us six days in which to pursue our investigations; for as soon as the camels returned we should have to resume our journey.

The first day I devoted to an astronomical observation, whilst the men roamed about the neighbourhood, hunting and investigating. Meanwhile I also took from the top of the tower two or three photographs, which are here reproduced (pp. 116, 117*), and which give a clearer idea of the locality than any amount of mere description. The view was broad and open, and altogether *sui generis*. The desert presented a uniform dreary aspect, with its sharp-edged, broken terraces and "tables"—yardangs of yellow clay. At intervals stood a house, more or less mutilated by time; but the entire region was absolutely uninhabited except for myself and my dog Yolldash. As I surveyed the scene, a feeling of solemnity and of expectation stole over me. I felt—I knew, that I was face to face with a great problem, and its solution. Would this niggardly soil, which, beyond doubt contained many secrets hidden in its bosom—would it reveal to me something that was known to no other human being in the world? Would it yield up to me some of its treasures? Would it grant me an answer to the host of questions which thronged in upon my brain? Anyway I meant to do my level best, to make those silent ruins speak. I had changed my original plan simply and solely that I might

* See also Vol. I., pp. 379, 385.



The First Clay Tower.

come back here. Surely it was not to be a mere waste of time! Surely my pains were not to be thrown away!

On the 5th of March, whilst my people were busy digging away with all their might, I took a morning walk amongst the ruins. In a little while they turned over the interior of a house, but without finding anything of importance beyond the wheel of an *araba* (Turkestan cart), and some nicely-turned pilasters. At the same time they unearthed a few trifles of no value, except in so far as they suggested inferences as to the manner of life of the ancient inhabitants. Amongst them were pieces of red cloth, precisely like that which the lamas wear at the present

A Copper Lamp from Lôu-lan.

day, felt rags, tufts of brown human hair, bones of sheep and cattle, soles of Chinese shoes, a leaden utensil, remarkably well-preserved pieces of rope, shards of clay pottery with simple ornamentation, an earring, Chinese coins, and so forth, and so forth.

In one enclosure, which had probably been a stall or fold, they came across a thick layer of manure, showing that horses, cattle, sheep and camels had been sheltered there. Its preservation was due to the fact that it had been buried under a thick layer of sand and dust. But there were no inscriptions, not a single letter to throw any light upon the mystery. The only fragment of paper the men picked up was a small yellow strip,

without any writing upon it. Close beside our camp stood the framework of another house, but inside it we discovered nothing.

The circumstances here were altogether different from those of the ancient towns which I discovered during my former journey beside the Keriya-daria. There the ruins were smothered in sand; here the ground was perfectly bare. Everything that the former inhabitants left behind them or forgot was exposed

A View to the South-west from the Tora at our Camp. (In the Foreground is my Yurt, protected by Beams against a Landslide. In the Background the Clay Desert with its Wind-sculptured Yardangs.)

to the destructive influences of wind and weather. There was no sand whatever, except a thin layer on the sheltered side of the clay terraces, which nowhere exceeded ten feet in height.

The most imposing edifice still standing was the tower. This had for me an especial attraction, and I ordered the men to begin work with it. It might, like an ancient Northern burial mound, contain valuable finds in its interior. But, before they could start upon it, a big piece had to be pulled down off the

The Ruined House nearest to our Camp.

top. Down it crashed like a waterfall, sending clouds of dark brown dust scudding across the desert. Then the men dug down into it, making a vertical hole like a well. To have made a tunnel in from the side would have been too dangerous; for the walls were already full of big cracks, and the dry, loose material might easily have fallen in. The tower, however, was massively built, over 28¾ feet high, and held together by horizontal beams. Up to the height of ten feet the sun-dried bricks had a reddish tinge, as if they had been slightly burned. Altogether there were in this immediate locality nineteen houses, stretching in a long line from 30° east of south to 30° west of

The Clay Tower seen from the North-East.

north. I made an accurate chart of them; but to enter into a detailed description of them here would occupy too much space. I must confine myself, therefore, to a few brief general observations.

Some of the houses were built entirely of wood, the planks which formed the walls being morticed into a foundation framework of beams, resting immediately upon the surface. In others the walls consisted of sheaves of kamish, lashed by means of withes to poles and spars. A few of the houses were built of *adobe*, or sun-dried clay. Most of these ancient dwellings were, however, razed to the ground; but several of the beams and posts still stood upright, although greatly decayed through wind and

sand. It was impossible to draw from the woodwork any inferences as to their age. It certainly looked very old, and was of a greyish-white colour, cracked, and as brittle as glass. One would have thought that such material, exposed as it was to storms, to drift-sand, and the enormous difference of 175° to 200° between the maximum summer temperature and the minimum winter temperature, would have been destroyed within a comparatively short space of time. Three door-frames still remained *in situ*, and in one of them the door itself was still hanging,

The Top of the Tower Falling.

wide open, just as it had been left, probably, by the last occupant, but it was now half buried in the sand.

The whole of the buildings stood upon elevated ground; but a single glance was sufficient to show that they had originally been placed upon the level ground. For the earthern platforms were of precisely the same shape as the ground-plan of the houses; while the soil all around, in so far as it was not protected, had been scooped out and blown away by the wind. As the trenches at the side were fully ten feet below the former level of the district, it was pretty evident that a very long time must have elapsed since these dwellings were deserted. The poplars, bushes and reeds also grew upon relatively elevated ground.

When I awoke on the morning of the 6th of March, I found all five men had disappeared, and I had to light my fire and

The Clay Tower seen from the South.

get my breakfast as best I could. We had agreed the night before that we would spend a whole day looking for a better place, and the men had now gone off in different directions to make a thorough hunt for other ruins. Before they started, they had gathered a heap of wood, and if they were not back by dusk, I was to recall them by a signal fire. I described to Shagdur where our camp had been the year before, and where he was to look for the ruins which Ördek had discovered.

Everything was as peaceful as a Sabbath morning, reminding me of the hours I spent in the leafy huts beside the Khotandaria in 1895, after the shepherds had driven their flocks into the

Ruined House with its Doorway still Standing *in situ*.

woods to graze. I photographed several of the ruins; I took a meridian altitude, finished my plan of the locality, and examined various strata of the clay deposits. These were six in number, and of varying thickness. Some of them contained snail-shells and vegetable remains; others were without any, showing that they had been deposited at different periods and under different climatic conditions. Possibly the layers which were destitute of organic life were laid down in salt water.

The day passed quietly. Towards evening my scouts came back one by one, recalled by the signal-fire I lighted. It was nine o'clock before Shagdur came in. He had been on foot the whole day without resting; the others, I knew perfectly well, had slept through the middle of the day. He had had a

good many tumbles in the dark down the clay terraces; for the depressions or trenches between them were perfectly black, it was impossible to see how deep they were. He was just making up his mind to stay where he was till morning, when he caught sight of the fire. But he had been successful: fine fellow that he was, he had persevered, until he did find, not only our previous camp, but also the scene of Ördek's discovery.

The 7th of March we devoted to the investigation of the latter site. I set off at 8 o'clock, taking all the men with me, except Kutchuk, whom I left behind to look after the signal-fire. It was a beautifully bright day, with a cool north-east wind, which moderated the heat at noon. Guided by Shagdur, we proceeded due south from the clay tower of the 3rd of March. At intervals we observed beams lying on the ground, pointing to the sites of former dwellings. One of these measured 25½ feet in length, its other dimensions being 13¾ inches by 6½ inches. Thus the poplars which once grew there must have been as fine trees as any that now stand in the primeval forests of the Tarim. We crossed on the way a deep depression resembling an old canal, and saw yet another tora; in fact, every village or "town" in this locality seemed to have had its clay tower.

The country we were traversing was of exceptional interest, and deserves a word or two of description. We were marching west-north-west, and consequently had to cross the clay terraces in a zig-zag line up and down them. A few small clumps of primeval poplars were still standing, the arrangement being precisely similar to that of the existing poplar groves beside the Kara-köll and Chivillik-köll, and the lower arms and connecting channels of the Tarim. That is to say, they sometimes stood in rows, sometimes were concentrated in clumps, plainly showing the outline of lake shore or river bank. Evidently in the places where they were wanting, there had been expansions of the lake or connecting river-arms. Kamish stubble was abundant everywhere, though it was only eight or nine inches high. The stalks were so loaded with sand and dust that they crumbled like clay at the least touch; but the long-bladed leaves, which, however, were far seldomer preserved, still retained their flexibility. In fact the very timber of this region was so heavily charged with sand that on being placed in water it sank.

At length we reached the site of our camp of the year before, easily recognizable by the heaps of ashes left from our fires.

Another mile and we reached the scene of Ördek's discovery. Here we found eight houses; but of these only three were sufficiently preserved to admit of being measured. They were arranged on the same plan as a Chinese *yamen* (or offices of a Chinese administrator); that is to say, a main building flanked

Carved Poplar Wood. On the right an Image of Buddha; underneath it a Fish. The Vertical line on the left measures one metre (= 3.281 feet).

by two wings, with a courtyard between them. The south-east side of the latter was fenced in by palings or a plank fence, with an open gateway, the side-posts of which were still standing. The main building, which was rather small, had clearly been a Buddhist temple. This was the actual spot where Ördek had made his discoveries. The tracks of his horse were still discernible in a hollow close by.

The spades were soon at work amongst the sand, and after a while out came Buddha himself, though not altogether in the most graceful form of incarnation. The image was made of wood, and the head and arms were still intact. But this, it was clear, was only the foundation or backing of a clay idol, which had been painted and decorated in the usual way.

The accompanying photographs (pp. 125, 127, 133, 135) will convey a clearer idea of the carved woodwork which I brought home with me from this place than any amount of description in words. However, I may just dwell for a moment upon one or two of them. On one beam were depicted a row of images of Buddha, standing; on another a similar row of Buddha, sitting, each individual figure being surmounted with an aureole, shaped like a rounded arch. One ornamental device consisted of a fish surrounded by leaves and scroll-work, the gills and scales being perfectly distinct. Now, the artist would never have thought of using such a poor decorative object as a fish, unless it had been a creature of peculiar importance in the locality, and, we may also say, unless it had constituted one of the most important items in the food of the inhabitants; otherwise it would have been contrary to all rhyme and reason to combine fish instead of birds with leaves and garlands. Even if there existed no other incontrovertible proofs that these villages formerly stood on the shores of a lake, we should be quite justified in inferring the fact from the use of the fish as a decorative device in these wood carvings. Taking the country as it is now, a fish would be the very last creature in the world you would ever think of in such a connection.

The lotus flower also formed a conspicuous and pleasing device in these wood carvings. It occurred in long rows on some of the thickest planks, as also on panels, nineteen or twenty inches long, fixed in between them.

In this same place we also made another important discovery. Shagdur was digging and poking about with his spade, when he turned up a small tablet of wood, covered over with writing in a script which I was unable to decipher. This, however, Shagdur had not noticed, for he had flung the piece of wood on one side as a thing of no value; but I happened to be standing by, and thought how well-preserved it was, and so by mere chance stooped and picked it up. Every letter was sharp-cut and distinct, and written in India ink, but the script was neither Arabic, nor Chinese, nor Mongolian, nor Tibetan,

Carved Pieces of Wood from the Ruins.

What could be the purport of these mysterious words? What was the information locked up in them? I at once took care of the little tablet, and preserved it as if it were a precious stone. Hence the reward of ten *sïr* (about 30s.), which I had promised to the first man who discovered a piece of writing of any description fell to Shagdur. And as I offered a similar reward for the next find of the same character, the men redoubled their efforts, and without the slightest scruple literally turned the interior of the temple inside out. They sifted the sand through their fingers; they pounced upon every scrap of wood, and turned it over and examined it from every side—but without success.

Excavating the Buddhist Temple.

The only things that came to light were the string of a rosary, some Chinese copper money, and a heap of small earthenware cups or bowls, which had clearly been placed in front of the images of the gods to hold the offerings of the faithful.

How different, how exceedingly different, this region was now as compared with what it must have been formerly! Here was now not a single fallen leaf, not a single desert spider; the scorpions, which are very fond of withered poplars, would have sought a hiding-place in vain. There was only one power which brought sound and movement into these dreary, lifeless wastes—namely, the wind. Unless we had had touch with a spring, we could not possibly have stayed there a week as we did.

The great number of wood carvings, small as well as great, which we excavated, plainly proved that this little temple, with its tasteful and minute ornamentation, must have been a perfect gem of artistic construction. I can imagine how beautiful a spot it was—the temple, with its elegant façade, which was probably painted as well as adorned with wood carvings, embowered amid shady poplar groves, with an arm of the lake touching it, and the green or yellow reed-beds spread all round it, except where they were interrupted by patches of cultivated ground, irrigated by the water of the winding canals! Round about it were the scattered villages, their clay towers

Clay Tower near the Buddhist Temple.

peeping over the tops of the woods, and high enough to show their signal-fires to their neighbour-villages when danger or war threatened, but in times of peace marking the great highway which passed near this sacred spot. Southwards stretched far and wide the bluish-green waters of Lop-nor, set about with forest groves, and bordered by immense expanses of reeds and sedge, swarming with fish, wild duck, and wild geese. The background of the picture to the north would be, then as now, in clear weather, the Kurruk-tagh, where the people were in touch with the springs and oases, and across which a road undoubtedly led to Turfan. In other words, it was plain to us pilgrims of a later age that this region had once been more

beautiful than any now existing in East Turkestan. For at the present day one could nowhere find in that part of Asia houses decorated with such tasteful and artistic feeling as these were. And it requires no great effort of imagination to conceive how effectively the dense masses of foliage and their vivid greenness would show up the architecture.

Look upon that picture and then look upon the picture of the scene as it is now! An endless array of cenotaphs! And why is this? It is simply because a river, the Tarim, has changed its course, and now empties itself into new lakes farther to the south. The ancient lake would seem to have dried up very

The Ruined Building in which the MSS. were Discovered.

quickly, perhaps in the course of a few years, though the forest and the reeds subsisted for a long time upon the moisture which had been absorbed by the ground, but afterwards they gradually withered away, the trees which had the deepest roots being, of course, the most tenacious of life. Now, however, they were all dead, and the country resembled a cemetery; the inscriptions on its tombstones alone perpetuating the memory of its former luxuriant vegetation.

We were well satisfied with our day's work, when towards sunset we suspended operations, and started back for camp. The wind freshened, the sky in the east was grey and ominous, the haze deepened; it looked as if we were going to have a hard blow, and we made haste to get home before dark. The wind

swept through the gulleys, or depressions between the clay terraces, driving rivers of sand before it. We could distinctly perceive their destructive effects in filing away the sides and edges of the terraces. At length we caught sight of Kutchuk's signal-fire, and succeeded in getting home in time, although completely tired out by our seventeen miles tramp. It was not, however, so much the distance, as the difficulties of the surface, which wearied us. And I can tell you that the big flagon of ice-cold water, flavoured with lime juice and sugar, was simply delicious, for we had had nothing to drink all day.

The next morning, the 8th of March, the buran was still raging, and the air was thick with dust. It would have been impossible to find the ruins of the temple; but the men, their zeal quickened by the hope of the promised reward, dug everywhere all round the camp, working like niggers, and this time their efforts were crowned with a success such as I had scarcely dared to dream of. After ransacking the sand in a number of wooden houses without finding anything, they turned their attention to a building of sun-dried bricks, which resembled a stable with three stalls; at any rate, it was apparently the least promising in the entire village. Nevertheless here Mollah unearthed, in the highest stall, a fragment of crumpled up paper, with several perfectly distinct Chinese script-signs written upon it. It would certainly be no exaggeration to say that every grain of sand inside those walls was riddled, as it were, through a sieve. Two feet under the surface, buried under the accumulated sand, we came across what may best be described as a dust-heap or "kitchen-midden," containing a number of precious rarities, such as rags of carpet, pieces of shoe-leather, sheep bones, grain and stalks of wheat and rice, vertebræ of fish, and underneath all this rubbish—over 200 strips of paper, containing writing, and 42 tablets of wood, resembling small flat rulers in shape—these also covered with writing.

This was quite a triumph. Perhaps you will think that an exaggerated expression for a few fragments of old paper. Not at all! I at once realised that these insignificant pieces of paper contained a little piece of the world's history, perhaps hitherto unknown, and that they would, at any rate, furnish me with the key to the Lop-nor problem. The purely geographical and geological investigations had disclosed the actual facts with sufficient clearness: that is to say, they proved that here where all was now desert, there must formerly have existed the basin of

A Signal Fire at the Tower of Lôu-lan.

[Vol. II.—*To face p.* 132.

a large lake, and that here amongst these ruins human beings had once dwelt. But these fragmentary documents would now put the crown upon my toilsome investigations, the object of my study and attention for so many years, by telling me in plain black and white, *when* this lake existed, and *who* the people were who lived here, under what conditions they lived, with what parts of the interior of Asia they had been connected—nay, perhaps the very name which their country bore. This land which had, as it were, been wiped off the face of the earth—these people whom history had long forgotten, whose fate had perhaps never been recorded in any annals—

Some of Shagdur's Discoveries.

upon all this I hoped that light would now be shed. I held in my hands the story of a bygone age. I hoped to re-awaken it to life. Even though those people were a small people, and an insignificant community, my find would at any rate serve to bridge over a gap in the scheme of human knowledge. The Mussulmans had hoped, us usual, to find gold; but I would not have exchanged these scraps of torn and dirty letters for untold gold.

I inferred that this was a rubbish-heap from the fact, first that the space was too small for a dwelling, and secondly, that almost every piece of paper was a fragment, pointing to the originals having been torn up and thrown away. But this very

circumstance led me to hope that they consisted only or chiefly of local letters, in which case their contents would probably deal with local circumstances, and consequently, for my special purpose, would be of far greater importance than huge folios about any other locality.

After my return home, I sent all this written material to the learned Chinese scholar, Herr Karl Himly, at Wiesbaden. This he is now studying, and he will in due course publish the results of his investigations. But his first preliminary scrutiny resulted in several interesting observations with regard to which he wrote me as follows :—

" The data, and other indications of date, point to the period between the middle of the third and the beginning of the fourth century A.D. The place where the discovery was made seems to have belonged to a well-to-do Chinese merchant, who carried on a sort of livery business, for he let out carriages and beasts of burden on hire, undertook to deliver letters to Tun-huang (Sa-chow), and so forth. People and goods were conveyed to that town by horses, carriages, and horned cattle. One document speaks of a military expedition, though without giving a date. Amongst the geographical names we find the name of the country in question—Lôu-lan. The inhabitants must have carried on agriculture, for the documents make frequent mention of weights and measures of seed-corn, and some of them indicate different kinds of seed-corn. Very possibly at the place where these pieces of paper were excavated there formerly stood a sort of treasure house or species of seed-corn bank, where seed-corn was bought and stored, or received as security for debt. These documents show one peculiarity : they are written on both sides, a practice which does not now obtain in China, either with regard to writing or printing.

" In any case the collection, which is of great interest even for the Chinese themselves, is of such a character that for a long time to come it will be certain to claim the attention of European savants. Some of the sheets consist simply of exercises in writing. Others are fragments, differing but little in their script from that which is now in vogue. The wooden tablets have this advantage over the pieces of paper, that each, as a rule, contains one or more complete sentences, and conveys some real information, *e.g.*, an antelope has been delivered, so much seed-corn has been brought in, so many people have been provisioned for a month or more, and so forth.

"To judge from the following sentence, the governor, who had his residence here, would seem to have governed a not inconsiderable province: 'Forty officials are to receive the army at the frontier (or shore ?), and the farms are numerous.' He seems also to have had two native princes at his court.

"Most of the documents date from the years 264–270 A.D.

Carved Wooden Ornamentation from a House in Lôu-lan.

In the year 265 A.D. the Emperor Yüan Ti, of the Wei dynasty, died, and in the north the Tsin succeeded to power under Wu Ti, who reigned till the year 290 A.D. Most of the copper coins which can be deciphered are what are known as *wu-tshu* pieces, and thus date from the period 118 B.C. to 581 A.D. Besides these there are numerous coins known as *huo-thsüan*, which date back to Wang Mang, who flourished between the years 9 and 23 A.D.

Consequently the dates on the coins agree with those of the letters and wooden tablets."

Even this short preliminary statement by Herr Himly makes it sufficiently clear that important information is to be derived from the collection which I brought home. For one thing it throws an unexpected light upon the political relations in Central Asia during the early centuries after Christ; and, in the next place, it shows what extraordinary changes have taken place in that part of the world within the last 1,600 years.

A learned mandarin at Kashgar, to whom I showed the manuscript, told me that the region round the existing Pichan near Turfan, was anciently called Lôu-lan. This and other historical data, to which reference will be made in the next chapter, taken in conjunction with my investigations into the physical geography of that part of the world, and with my enquiries as to the shifting character of the lake of Lop-nor, are undoubtedly of inestimable value. Not only do they give us information about the country of Lôu-lan, on the northern shore of the ancient Lop-nor, but they also throw light upon several other unsolved problems of that part of Asia. They tell us, for instance, that there was a regular postal service between Lop-nor and Sa-chow, and thus that there existed an established means of communication through the Desert of Gobi. This discovery invests with a totally different meaning the ancient highway from Korla along the Koncheh-daria, where on a previous occasion I noted a chain of clay towers (*pao-tais*) and fortified posts. In a former chapter of this work I have had occasion to speak of the ruins of Ying-pen ; * they, too, without doubt, mark an important station on the same ancient highway.

That agriculture was carried on in Lôu-lan is a piece of information of the greatest possible interest. How was it possible ? Not a single rivulet now flows down from the Kurruk-tagh ; not a drop of rain now falls from the sky. Yes, but the climate may have altered, some one will perhaps say. Not at all. In the heart of a vast continent the climate does not undergo, even in the course of fifteen or sixteen centuries, such tremendous changes as that would imply. No; canals must have been led off either from the Tarim or the Kum-daria, and from them again irrigation *ariks* (channels), such as are now found all over East Turkestan. Seed-corn banks, of the kind here indi-

* See Vol. I., p. 344.

cated, are found at the present day in every town in East Turkestan. They are under the control of the Chinese authorities, and serve to secure an equal distribution of food amongst the native inhabitants. It is true, I only found four towns, the largest of which consisted of nineteen houses; but the desert may quite easily contain several others. And the mention of "armies," "40 officials," and "numerous farms" suggests that Lôu-lan was thickly inhabited. Perhaps the people lived, as they do at the present day, for the greater part in perishable huts of reed. In that case the ruins which we discovered would be those of the official centres, and the dwellings of the more

On the Left an Earthenware Vase, in the Middle a Wheel, on the Right the MSS. House, and in the Distance the Clay Tower.

distinguished men; and it is also likely that these stood near the watch-towers, while the huts of the fishing population would be built along the lake side, and would naturally perish long before the more durable buildings.

We had still one day left to spend at this—I was going to say holy—place. In any case, it was a locality which awakened feelings of sadness at the perishableness of earthly things, and at the thought that cities and races are swept off the face of the earth like chaff before the wind. When I awoke on the morning of the 9th of March the men had already been at work two hours, and came and brought their several finds to my yurt. These consisted of fragments of paper and wooden tablets

like those of yesterday, all of which had been picked up in the north-east stall. Nothing was found in the other two stalls. Amongst the "treasures" the men displayed were fish-bones, bones of domestic animals, including those of the pig, rags, two or three pencils, a whip, a skeleton of a rat, and so on. Perhaps the most important of all was a red clay vase in perfect condition. It was 2 feet 3½ inches high and 2 feet 1½ inches in diameter, but had no handles. It was probably carried in a sort of willow basket with handles to it, which the men turned up beside it; shards of similar pieces of ware were extraordinarily plentiful. We also dug out a smaller vase; it, too, in perfect condition.

I spent a large part of the day in sketching architectural details, especially in noting carefully the manner in which the beams, posts and planks, which formed the framework of the houses, were put together. The tallest of the posts still remaining *in situ* was just one inch above fourteen feet.

In the afternoon the caravan arrived from the spring, bringing with them ten *tagars* (reed-bags) and six *tulums* (goat-skins) all filled with ice.

CHAPTER VII.

LÔU-LAN.

As it may possibly be of interest to learn something further about the country which bore the name at the head of this chapter, I will add the substance of two papers by competent authorities as to what it said about it in ancient Chinese sources. The first is a paper entitled, "*Sven Hedin's Ausgrabungen am alten Lop-nur*" (*i.e.*, "Sven Hedin's Excavations beside the Ancient Lop-nor"), by Herr Himly, in *Petermanns Mitteilungen* (1902 Part XII., pp. 288-290); the other is a paper by Mr. George Macartney, of Kashgar, in the *Geographical Journal*, March, 1903.

After a short introduction, Herr Himly writes thus: "The name Lop-nur is not an invention of the present (Turki) inhabitants, for the word *nur*, meaning a 'lake,' is a Mongolian word. Previous to the middle of the 18th century the boundary between the Khalkha Mongols and the Kalmucks, or Western Mongols, ran just here. . . . . According to Hedin's statements in *Petermanns Ergänzungsheft*, No. 131 (1900), he regarded the lake of Kara-köll, which lay further to the south-east, as a surviving part of the ancient lake. But this was known to the Chinese long before the Mongol era, and bore several names, some Chinese, some native—Yen-tsö, a Chinese word meaning 'Salt Lake'; Puthshang-hai, 'hai' being a Chinese word meaning 'sea'; Yao-tsö; Lôu-lan-hai, etc. Now Lôu-lan was the name of a country which, by reason of its situation between the great northern highway and the great southern highway from China to Europe, played, in spite of its small size, a very important part in the wars between the Chinese emperors of the Han dynasty

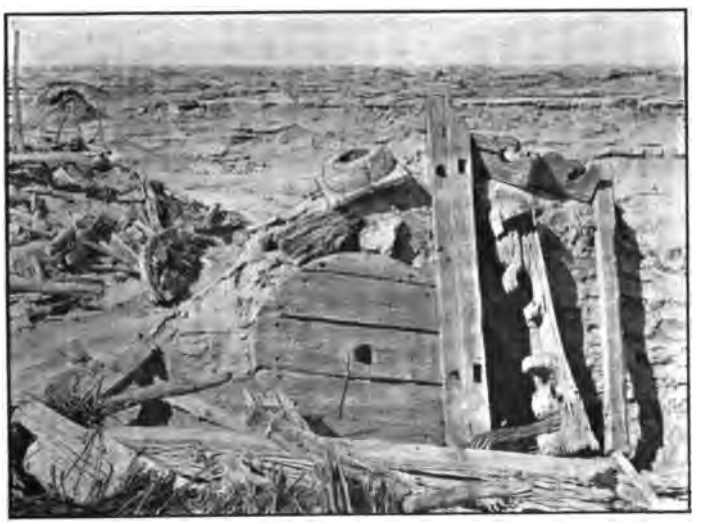
and the Hiung-nu [Turks or Huns] in the second century before our era, in that it acted as a kind of buffer state between the two powers. The famous pilgrim, Hüan-Tshuang (*i.e.*, Hwen-thsang), when on his way home from India, touched this country in the year 645 A.D., after crossing the desert from Khotan. Even at that time the inhabitants were being driven out of the towns, and their dwellings buried under the sand; indeed, several of the cities north of Khotan were then in ruins. But the shifting sand was not the only danger the people had to fear: they were also in peril from vast accumulations of water. According to the *Shuêi-king-tshu*, the waters were gathered in a basin of the lake north-east of Shan-shan (*i.e.*, Lôu-lan), and south-west of Lung-thshöng (Dragon Town), which was destroyed by an inundation in the Tshi-ta epoch (1308-1311). But the ruins still remained. Perhaps this was the ancient site which Hedin rediscovered on the occasion of his last visit to the Lop-nur district. . . . . Amongst his finds were small covers, which were docketed, and for the most part bore little grooves for the strings by which they were tied. That these covers were intended for "envelopes" to hold documents might be inferred, partly from the dockets themselves, partly from similar discoveries which were made near the Niya river by Dr. Stein in January, 1901; see Plate IX. of his *Preliminary Report*, where similar covers are very distinctly shown. . . . . Amongst the smaller objects unearthed, the copper coins are of especial interest. With one exception they are Chinese, and belong to a definite series of centuries. All have the familiar square hole in the middle, by means of which they are wont to be strung together by the hundred. Inscriptions such as generally characterise Chinese imperial coins of the period beginning with the year 376 A.D., and which are without exception present on those subsequent to the year 621 A.D., do not occur on a single coin in Hedin's collection. His coins generally bear the number of the *wu-tshu* (5 *tshu*, or $\frac{5}{24}$ *liang*, or 1 ounce) in ancient sphragistic script, in which the 5's resemble the Roman ten (X); this style was used between the years 118 B.C. and 581 A.D. Some of the coins bear the inscription *huo-thsüan* (according to Endlicher's translation = 'medium of barter'), well known from the Wang Mang epoch (9-22 A.D.). One coin, in which the central hole is oblong, bears an inscription which has not yet been interpreted.

"Amongst the remaining objects a small cut gem is of especial interest. It shows clearly a Hermes, who, as the deity

Excavating a House in Lôu-lan. In the Foreground the Big Earthenware Jar.

of travellers, found his way through Bactria to Central Asia. Skilfully made triangular arrows, and others smaller and flat, perhaps intended for shooting birds, and both of bronze; distaffs; an ear-ring set with pearls; copper wire; iron nails; cowrie shells, with an opening at the top made by some sharp instrument; copper and brass bells (for horses ?); fragments of small bronze hand-bells; amber and amber beads; copper rings; various kinds of domestic utensils or fragments of the same made of different kinds of stone or semi-precious stones, such as nephrite, alabaster; ornamented green glass, etc.—all these convey an idea of the degree of development to which either the native handicrafts had advanced, or of the value which the native inhabitants attached to the products of other people.

"As to the question of the period at which the place perished,



"Finds" from Lôu-lan. The Clay Desert in the Background.

and what it—whether town or country—was called, here the documents which Hedin discovered speak more clearly. The name Lôu-lan occurs both on the wooden tablets and on the fragments of paper, and in such a connection as to leave no doubt that this was the name of the place to which the letters were addressed, or at which they were preserved. One of the tablets speaks of letters which were sent to Tun-huang and Tsiu-Thsüan (Su-Chow). On the same tablet, but below this statement, the 15th day of the 3rd month of the sixth year of the

Thai-Shi epoch—that is to say, the sixth year of the Emperor Tsin Wu Ti (265 A.D.)—is given as the date on which a letter was received in Lôu-lan. On one of the covers, which exactly resembles the covers shown on Plate IX. of Dr. Stein's *Preliminary Report*, except that it is smaller, the Prince of the Lake Concerns and his wife (Tien-shî Wang Hu) are named as receiving the same in Lôu-lan. The first date given is the year 264, when the Wei dynasty ruled over the northernmost of the 'three kingdoms.' Other dates are the years 266, 268, 269, and 270. The name Lôu-lan occurs twice on the paper fragments, which seem to have been deliberately torn. One of them contains an insignificant statement, to the effect that a certain Ma, of Lôu-lan, need not present himself on the sixth day of the sixth month; here we have the year 310, in connection with the town of An-si.

"The contents of these various documents are of very divers kinds. Some of them speak of deliveries of seed-corn; some are communications from Tun-huang; some speak of communications with Kao-tshang (ancient Turfan); some of judicial proceedings, etc. The wooden tablets clearly served, partly as diaries, partly for giving instructions to subordinates. One of the latter, which is broken, relates that 40 of the leaders of the army which has reached the border (*pien* (?) = 'frontier' or 'shore') are to be lodged in the farms near the dams. One small wooden tablet bears a non-Chinese inscription; it resembles the Kharoshthi script of Dr. Stein (see Plates IX., X., XI.).

"From all this there can scarcely exist a doubt that this was the site of the ancient Lôu-lan, and that Lou-lan stood beside the ancient lake of Lop-nur. The town would seem to have been destroyed by a desert storm or by an inundation, or by both, in the beginning of the fourth century. The people would then seem to have built in the same neighbourhood another town, the so-called Dragon Town, which in its turn was destroyed by a storm and flood in 1308-11."

My old friend, Mr. George Macartney, of Kashgar, a profound scholar of Chinese, has a paper in the March number, 1903, of the *Geographical Journal*, which I here, with his kind permission, repeat *in extenso*. It is entitled, *Notices, from Chinese Sources, on the Ancient Kingdom of Lau-lan, or Shen-shen*, and, when read in conjunction with Herr Himly's, furnishes a very clear conception of that kingdom of nearly 2,000 years ago.

The actual name of Lau-lan is well known to modern Chinese geographers, but hitherto, apparently, neither they nor savants in Europe have been able to fix with anything like accuracy the position of the country anciently called by that name. Mr. A. Wylie, a Chinese scholar of eminence, in 1880 had computed this position to be 39° 40′ N. lat. and 94° 50′ E. long. Now this would show an error approximately of 250 miles if we are right in understanding that the place where Dr. Hedin found the Chinese manuscripts, bearing the name Lau-lan, was in about 40° 40′ N. lat. and 90° E. long. The more accurate localization of Lau-lan, now apparently possible, may, it is hoped, lead to some useful results in the identification of other neighbouring countries whose ancient names are known, but whose positions are still a puzzle to modern geographers.

If the *Tsien Han-shu* ("History of the First Hans") and the records left by Fa-Heen and Hsian-Tsang were consulted, we should find many places mentioned therein, with their distances given with reference to Lau-lan. Thus, the *Tsien Han-shu* (written roughly between B.C. 100 and A.D. 50) mentions the following distances: From Wu-ni (capital of Lau-lan) to the Yang barrier (evidently in the direction of Tun-huang), 1,600 li*; to Chang-an, 6,100 li; to the seat of government of the Chinese governor-general (name not given) in a north-westerly direction, 1,785 li; to Si-an-fu, 1,365 li; to Keu-tse (Ouigour) in a north-westerly direction, 1,890 li. Fa-Heen (fifth century A.D.), in the record of his travels, gives the following distances: From Shen-shen or Lau-lan to Tun-huang, about 17 marches, 1,500 li; to Wu-e (Urgur ?), 15 marches on foot in a north-westerly direction. From Hsian-Tsang we learn that Lau-lan, which he also calls Na-po-po, is situated 1,000 li north-east of Chémo-tó-na, also called Nimo. It will be seen from this that the site of Lau-lan can serve as a point of reference for determining the position of several other places. Perhaps the indications given above may prove to be of use to subsequent archæological surveyors.

But this is far from all that can be learnt about Lau-lan from Chinese records. The *Tsien Han-shu* tells us that China began intercourse with this country in the reign of the Emperor Wu-ti (B.C. 140–87), at whose time the western boundary of the empire would seem to have extended no further than the Yang barrier (possibly Tun-huang) and the Yu gate (modern Chia-Yu-kuan ?). The vast country lying beyond these places was designated by the Chinese geographers of the epoch under the vague term of Si-yu (western region), which they supposed to be divided into thirty-six different kingdoms. We are told there were two roads leading from China to this region: "That *viâ* Lau-lan, skirting the river Po (lower Tarim ?), on the north

* A li = ·358 mile.

of the Southern mountains (Altyn-Ustun-tagh ?), and leading west to Sa-chê (Yarkand) is the southern road. That by the Palace of the Anterior at Keu-tse (Ouigour kingdom ? 1,890 li from Lau-lan), following the river Po in the direction of the Northern mountains (Tian-shan) as far as Su-leh (Kashgar) is the northern road."

The watercourse in the Tarim basin is described in the following terms: "The river (Khotan-daria ?) runs northwards till it joins a confluent from the Tsung-ling (Onion range, in Sarikol), and then flows eastwards into the Pú-cháng-hai (lit. Calamiferous Lake), which is also called the Salt Marsh. This is over 300 li from the Yu gate and the Yang barrier, and is 300 li in length and breadth. The water is stationary, neither increasing nor diminishing in summer or winter, The river is then said to run underground and issue again at Tseih-shih, where it becomes the Yellow river of China."

The following is a *précis* of the account found in the *Tsien Han-shu* of the political relations between China and Lau-lan during the first century B.C. The Emperor Wu-ti, we are told, was desirous of cultivating intercourse with Ta-wan and adjacent countries, and repeatedly sent ambassadors there. These had to pass through Lau-lan; but the people of Lau-lan, in concert with the Keu-tse, harassed the officials on the high-road, robbed and attacked Wang-Kuei, one of the envoys. Moreover, the Lau-lans made themselves objectionable to the Chinese by acting as spies for the Heun-nu or Hiung-nu (Huns), and on several occasions aided them in the pillage of Chinese travellers. All this was not to be tolerated. Wu-ti, therefore, prepared an expedition against the disaffected state. Chao Po-nu was sent with an army of 10,000 men to punish the Keu-tse, while the envoy Wang Kuei, who had suffered several times at the hands of the Lau-lans, received orders to act as Chao Po-nu's lieutenant. The latter, advancing at the head of 700 light horse, seized the king of Lau-lan, conquered the Keu-tse, and, relying on the prestige of his army, overawed the states dependent on Wu-sun and Ta-wan. The Lau-lans soon submitted, and sent offerings of tribute to the Emperor Wu-ti. But their submission gave offence to their allies, the Huns, who lost no time in attacking them. On this, by way of satisfying his two powerful neighbours, the king of Lau-lan sent one of his sons as hostage to the Huns, and another to the Emperor of China. Thus ended the first episode in the relations between China and the kingdom in question.

But more troubles were in store for Lau-lan. The Emperor Wu-ti, for some reason or other, had to send another punitive expedition against Ta-wan and the Huns. The Huns found the Chinese army so formidable that they deemed it prudent to avoid any direct encounter with it; but this did not prevent them from hiding troops in Lau-lan,

the inhabitants of which did not cease to be in league with them. These troops constantly harassed the army of Wu-ti. The Chinese soon got wind of Lau-lan's secret coalition with the Huns, and accordingly the general, Jen-wan, was sent to chastise them. Jen-wan proceeded to the city gate, which was opened to him, and reproached the king for his treachery. The king, in excuse, replied, "When a small state lies between two great kingdoms, it must perforce make alliances with both, or it can have no peace; but now I wish to place my kingdom within the bounds of the Chinese empire." Confiding in these words, the emperor re-established him on the throne, and commissioned him to keep watch over the movements of the Huns.

This king died in B.C. 92. Then a question of succession arose. It will be remembered that one of the sons of the deceased king was a hostage at the Chinese court. Now the Lau-lans made a petition to the emperor for the return of the hostage prince, in order that he might succeed to the vacant throne. The prince had not, however, been a *persona grata* with the emperor; in fact, all the time he was in China he had been kept in honourable confinement in the Silkworm House Palace. It therefore happened that the petition from Lau-lan was not favourably received by Wu-ti, but the answer returned was that of a diplomat. "I am tenderly attached," said Wu-ti, "to my attendant prince, and am loth to allow him to leave my side;" and the emperor suggested to the petitioners that they should install the next son of the deceased king in the royal dignity.

This the Lau-lans accordingly did. But the new king's reign was a short one, and on his death the question of succession again came to the front. This time the Huns, who, it will be remembered, had also a hostage prince from Lau-lan at their court, thought their opportunity had come to regain in that state the influence they had lost. They therefore sent the prince back, and established him on the throne. This successful *coup* alarmed the Chinese, who endeavoured, by bribery and intrigue, to recover their ascendancy. They made no direct attempt to dethrone the Huns' *protégé*, but sent an envoy requesting him to pay a visit to the Chinese court, where, the envoy said, liberal gifts would be bestowed on him by the emperor. But the emperor and the envoy little suspected that they had to reckon with a woman's cunning. The step-mother of the king was at hand, and she advised him, saying: "Your royal predecessor sent two sons as hostages to China; neither of them has ever come back, and is it reasonable that you should go?" The king thereupon dismissed the envoy with the words that, "having newly acceded to the throne, the affairs of the kingdom were engaging his attention, and that he could not attend the Chinese court before two years."

So far there had been no open hostility between the new king and the emperor, although, undoubtedly, relations between them were

strained. But now the event which was to put an end to Lau-lan as an independent state was imminent. It appears that on the eastern border of Lau-lan, where this kingdom was contiguous with China, there was a place called the Peh-lung mound. This place was on the high-road, *viâ* Lau-lan, from China to the western regions, and it suffered from drought, and had no pasturage. The Lau-lans were frequently called upon by the Chinese to furnish guides and carry water and provisions to this spot for passing officials. In the discharge of these duties the inhabitants were often exposed to the brutality of the Chinese soldiery. Friction was thus created; but the situation was

Reloading on the March.

made worse by the Huns, ever secretly instigating the Lau-lans against the Chinese. Finally, the Lau-lans resolved to break off friendly relations with Wu-ti, and forthwith murdered some of his envoys whilst passing through Lau-lan territory. This act of treachery was reported to the Chinese court by the king's younger brother, Hui Tu-chi, who, having made his submission to the Han monarch, was scheming to oust his elder brother from the throne. Accordingly, in B.C. 77, the Chinese general, Fu-keae-tsu, was sent to put the king to death. Fu-keae-tsu hastily selected a few followers, and, having spread a report that he was going to a neighbouring state on a mission of friendly inquiry, and had presents with him for the king, he journeyed to Lau-lan. On Fu-keae-tsu's arrival, the king, who suspected nothing, invited him to a sumptuous feast. Whilst the king was intoxicated, Fu gave the signal to his followers, and the king was stabbed in the

back. His head was severed from the body and suspended over the northern gate of the city. Hui Tu-chi, as a reward for his treachery, was set up as king in the place of his brother, and the kingdom was re-established under the new name of Shen-shen, for which a brevet of investiture was prepared. That nothing might be wanting to the prestige of the new ruler, one of the ladies of the imperial court was bestowed on him as consort, and on Hui Tu-chi leaving the Chinese capital for his kingdom, he was accorded a send-off marked with every honour. Thus was he established. But he did not feel himself secure in his new position. Being a Chinese *protégé*, he was looked upon with suspicion by the people over whom he had been called upon to rule. Moreover, the late king had left a son, and Hui Tu-chi lived in fear of assassination by him. Hui Tu-chi therefore petitioned the emperor to establish a military colony in Lau-lan, in the city of E-tun, where, he said, the land was "rich and productive." This was done, and the emperor sent a cavalry leader with forty subordinates "to cultivate the fields at E-tun and soothe the people." Thus was the rule of the great Han monarch extended over the state of Lau-lan, or Shen-shen.

At the epoch when these chronicles were written, which, presumably, was about the time of the birth of Christ, the kingdom of Shen-shen, we are told, contained 1,570 families, forming a population of 14,100, with 2,912 trained troops.

On the physical features of the country, the *Tsien Han-shu* says (translation by Mr. A. Wylie): "The land is sandy and salt, and there are few cultivated fields. The country relies on the neighbouring kingdoms for cereals and agricultural products. The country produces jade, abundance of rushes, the tamaria, the *Clœcocca vermicifera*, and white grass. The people remove their cattle for pasturage wherever they can find sufficiency of water and herbage. They have asses, horses, and camels. They can fabricate military weapons, the same as the people of Tso-kiang."

So much, then, for the information contained in the *Tsien Han-shu*. Here is what Fa-Heen says regarding Lau-lan, which he passed through in the fifth century A.D. on his way from China to India to procure the sacred books of Buddhism. The translation is that of Dr. J. Legge: "After travelling for seventeen days, a distance we may estimate of about 1,500 li (from Tun-huang), the pilgrims reached the kingdom of Shen-shen, a country rugged and hilly, with a thin and barren soil. The clothes of the common people are coarse and like those woven in our land of Han, some wearing felt, and others serge or cloth of hair. The king professed our law, and there might be in the kingdom more than 4,000 monks, who are all students of the *Hinayana* (small vehicle of salvation). The common people of this and other

kingdoms in this region, as well as the *sramans* (monks), all practise the rules of India, only the latter do so more exactly, and the former more loosely. Here the pilgrims stayed for about a month, and then proceeded on their journey, fifteen days' walking to the north-west bringing them to the country of Wu-e. In this there were more than 4,000 monks, all students of the *Hinayana*."

Hsian-Tsang, or Hwen-thsang (629–645 A.D.), passed through Lau-lan on his return from India, two centuries later than Fa-Heen, but his notice on this country is extremely meagre. We are merely told that, after leaving the walled but deserted town of Tche-mo-to-na, or Nimo, "he travelled 1,000 li in a north-easterly direction and reached Na-po-po, which is the same as Lau-lan."

All this goes to show that in its day Lôu-lan was a country of some importance. It is very probable that further excavations in the same neighbourhood would result in discoveries even more important than those which I made.

VIII.

A Survey of the Lop Desert.

A Wandering Lake.

CHAPTER VIII.

SURVEYING THE LOP DESERT.

THE camp was astir early on the morning of the 10th March; we were to leave the silent ruins to their millennial peace. Would any European pilgrim ever set foot within the walls of Lôu-lan again?

We gave the camels three sacks of ice, and let them eat as much corn as they liked; even then their loads were too heavy. The carved woodwork and other finds were tied up in bundles and the baggage rearranged, for I was now going to divide the caravan into two parties. Myself, I intended to cross the desert southwards to Kara-koshun, taking with me Shagdur, Kutchuk, Khodai Kullu, and Khodai Värdi, my object being to make an exact levelling of the ancient basin of Lop-nor. We only had four camels, three to carry ice, and one to carry our baggage; for we took with us nothing but food, clothes, the levelling instruments, one-half of the yurt, and one-half of my bed. The men slept in the open air. Our provisions, which consisted of rice and bread only, were divided into rations calculated to last eight days. The other half of the caravan, consisting of six camels, three horses, three dogs, and all the heavier baggage, besides ice and provisions for four days, was to pursue another route. This detachment I put in charge of Faisullah, and gave him Li Loyeh and Mollah to assist him.

Faisullah, who had crossed the desert with me from Altimish-bulak the year before, was instructed to proceed direct to Kum-chappgan, and there await our arrival. To make quite sure, I gave him a thorough lesson on the compass, and impressed it upon him that he was to stick to the south-west. I had every confidence in his prudence and good sense; but all the same, I thought it best to keep in my own hands all my map sheets, the MSS. and wooden tablets from Lôu-lan, my diaries, and

my scientific observations. Faisullah, before starting, was to help Khodai Värdi, whom I left behind to bring on the four camels.

Meanwhile I began the levelling, almost by pure chance, at the foot of the clay tower where my yurt had stood. There the levelling-pole, which was about 13 feet high, was set up for the first time; it was always fixed on a plate, so as not to sink in when we gave it a half turn. This instrument I put into Shagdur's hands, and he managed it capitally all through. We carried the levelling-tube 100 metres (110 yards) to the south, and I took my first reading; then Shagdur carried the levelling-pole another 100 metres to the south of me; and so on, turn about, day after day, all the way to Kara-koshun, a distance of 50½ miles. The distance between the tube and the pole was measured by Kutchuk and Khodai Kullu with a fifty-metre tape. Kutchuk also carried the levelling-tube and its stand, whilst I noted down the readings, took the compass bearings, entered the route, and made notes of the contours.

All this was absolutely new work to the men, and at first we made slow progress; but they soon learnt what was required of them, and after that everything went without a hitch.

Travelling south from Lôu-lan, we easily distinguished when we crossed the shore-line of the former lake. The dead trees, bushes, and reeds came to an end quite suddenly, and we stepped, almost at a stride, upon the dreary greyish-yellow clay, destitute of even the smallest trace of vegetation, which filled the bottom of the ancient lake. We moved the tube and pole ninety times, the total distance travelled being 5 miles 1,196 yards, before we stopped for the night. It was then rapidly growing dusk; but there were no signs of Khodai Värdi and the four camels. We went to the top of the nearest hill; no camels in sight! What was become of them? Had Khodai Värdi misunderstood my orders? Had he followed Faisullah? Had he stayed behind at the ruins? or—had he got lost? We made a big signal-fire as soon as we could find enough material. Shagdur went off into the darkness to look for him. I was a prey to the keenest anxiety. If Khodai Värdi had lost his way, his fate was sealed. He had never been in this quarter before, and had no idea as to the direction of Kara-koshun. If he failed to turn up, our position, too, would be highly critical, for we had neither water nor food with us. The distance to the lake was so great that we should scarcely be able to reach it, and a return to the

little spring was not to be thought of. What made me most uneasy was the thought of losing the results of four months' labour, and all through the stupidity of a servant.

We piled up the fire; we listened; not a sound! The desert was as dead and deserted as though it belonged to an uninhabited planet. We were parched and tired after our hard day's work; and instead of quenching our thirst, we had this gloomy disquietude to fight against. It only wanted a desert sandstorm, and our cup of misery would have been full. However, things were not so bad as we imagined. Towards midnight we heard shuffling sounds in the darkness; it was Khodai Värdi

The Caravan for the Levelling Expedition.

with the camels. I was so glad at seeing them that I forgot to give the fellow the rounding-up he deserved. He explained that it was the clay terrace which had forced him to deviate too far to the right, and he had been unable to hit upon our track again. Towards evening he had caught sight of a fire, which he knew to be Faisullah's, in the south-west, and then he understood where he was, and turned back. Eventually he perceived our fire, but it was a long way off; however, by keeping it steadily in sight he had at last found us. It was a wonder that in the dark none of the camels broke their legs in crossing the deep, gaping hollows between the terraces. We made haste to get up the tents and boil the kettle. Even to this day I cannot understand how a

man who generally showed common sense, could spend twelve hours wandering backwards and forwards over a tract of country which measured (along the straight line we followed) less than six miles, especially as even from our camp that night the clay tower of Lôu-lan was distinctly visible.

But now Shagdur was missing. I sent out Khodai Kullu to fire a succession of shots by way of signal, and for some time we heard them gradually dying away in the distance. Eventually, however, Khodai Kullu came back without finding Shagdur, and we went to sleep, for I was under no uneasiness on Shagdur's account. I knew that he could, in case of need, readily find his way to Kara-koshun; besides, he always carried a compass with him, and knew how to use it, and was familiar with my maps.

Next morning I was awakened by a violent storm, which swept dense clouds of fine sand through the depression in which we were encamped; it was like a river pouring in full flood down a newly-made channel. Surveying was, of course, quite out of the question: we must just stay where we were. Having nothing else to do, I spent a good deal of the time with the camels, patting them and talking to them. They were calm, contented, and dignified, as they always were, and appeared to think that it was part of the inevitable day's work that they should tramp backwards and forwards twenty or thirty miles through the desert. Regardless of the consequences, I ordered the men to give them a sack of kamish, and another of ice, which we had brought from the spring. Poor beggars! all except one died later on in Tibet!

About midday I was perfectly amazed to see Shagdur emerge out of the thick dust haze with a light, elastic step. Fine fellow! he was worth a dozen Mussulmans any day! He had been on foot since five o'clock the previous afternoon, having during the night visited Faisullah's camp, attracted by his fire. For, by way of experiment, I had requested Faisullah to keep up a good fire, that we might ascertain whether it was possible to see such a signal twelve miles across the desert; but it wasn't. Obtaining from Faisullah a small supply of rice and ice, Shagdur, notwithstanding that the storm was even then coming on, at once set off to return to us. Fortunately, he had kept a note of his compass-bearings. But that he ever did find us I regard as a remarkable feat. Nobody but a Buriat, who had spent his life in the open air, and who was a Cossack to boot, ever could

have done it. For, you must bear in mind, the distance between the two camps was fully twelve miles, the contour as level as a billiard table, and, owing to the sand-storm which was raging, it was impossible for any man to see fifty yards in front of him; while the wind soon obliterated entirely every footmark we left behind us.

I had not contemplated losing a day like this; but what mattered it, seeing that I had escaped the heavy loss I feared? We made an attempt to continue; but it would not do. The wind was blowing at the rate of 24½ miles an hour, and the pole would not stand firm, nor the tube either; so we just had to exercise patience, and spend yet another night in that dreary place.

The 12th of March, however, was a splendid day, and we made an early start, and worked on until sunset, only stopping for about ten minutes at one p.m. to take the readings of the meteorological instruments. I now made Khodai Kullu lead the camels, and keep close behind us. Our course lay towards the south-south-east; but as the depressions, eroded by the wind, ran towards the south-west, we had, of course, to cross each successive ridge or "table" at right angles. Not that this mattered much to those who were on foot; but to the camels it was very tiring, as they had to make long detours. One of these depressions was no less than 400 feet wide and 26¼ feet deep. This must have been one of the deepest places in the former lake, or possibly it was part of an ancient river-bed. That evening I examined, with the keenest interest, the results of the day's work: they showed that the contour had fallen eight feet in just under seven miles. I should never have been able to continue this tiresome and wearisome labour had I not expected it to yield important results.

The next day, although the country was depressingly monotonous to the eye, it was, on the other hand, all the easier to survey, and we made rapid progress. Upon seeing five successive flocks of wild-duck passing northwards overhead, Kutchuk shrewdly surmised that it was our relief expedition under Tokta Ahun which had frightened them up from the northern shore of Kara-koshun. It is probable that the wild-ducks spend the winter on these marshes, but go to Bagrash-köll for the summer. During this day's survey we ascended nine feet, and consequently were now only about six inches higher than our starting-point at Lôu-lan. To be accurate, in twenty miles we had

ascended a little over four and a quarter inches! This day's work gave me the key to the Lop-nor problem. The first two days we had descended, and the third ascended; thus we had manifestly crossed a depression, and that depression was the basin of the former Lop-nor. No matter what the results of the next day's work might be, this conclusion could not be upset. No matter what the level of Kara-koshun might be, as compared with our point of departure, we had, as a matter of fact, crossed a basin; and that this basin had contained water was conclusively proved by the snail-shells, and by other circumstances which I have already mentioned.

Just on the stroke of seven o'clock we heard a shrill whistling in the north-east, and, two or three minutes later, down came a black buran. We hurriedly took all necessary precautions—damped down the fire, saw to the fastenings of the yurt, and so forth. At nine o'clock Shagdur came into my yurt and fixed the boiling-point thermometer, and then set out to return to his own sleeping-place. Half an hour later, hearing a faint call in another direction, I shouted at the pitch of my voice—and Shagdur appeared at the opening of the yurt. He had lost his way, although his sleeping-place was only fifteen paces from mine. But then it was pitch dark; and it was impossible for any man to stand. Shagdur had been on his hands and knees the whole time. And now he was only able to reach his own quarters by creeping backwards with his eyes fixed on the light which streamed through a chink of the tent-cloth I held open for him. Only those who have been out in such a storm can form any conception of what it is like. You get bewildered, and want to keep going, without knowing where. Your sense of locality is paralyzed, and although you think you are going in a straight line, you are in reality describing a circle. It is a kind of desert-storm sickness, more nearly resembling the panic which seizes a person on the edge of a precipice than sea-sickness or mountain-sickness, because it affects the brain. If Khodai Värdi had been caught by a storm like that, he would infallibly have been lost.

Next morning the effects of this grim desert tempest were very easy to see; the sand was heaped up all round my yurt, and there were little mounds on the sheltered side of the camels. Thus, as soon as the drift-sand meets with a hindrance, it begins to form dunes, otherwise the wind carries it westwards. Fortunately the wind dropped at eleven o'clock, and we were able

to resume our survey. The desert was painfully monotonous: the ground consisted of what the natives call *shor*, *i.e.*, sand, dust, lime, and salt—all fused together and baked as hard as a brick, though sometimes the salt lay in a thin layer on the top. After the water left it, this mass would appear to have expanded, for it was crossed in every direction by a countless number of little ridges, some of which were as much as two to three feet in height. Of course there was not the slightest sign of organic life, not even so much as a snail-shell. There could be no question about it—this was the bottom of a salt lake; and we know that the Chinese did anciently call Lop-nor by a

A Gully in the Shor (Salt) Desert.

name which signified salt lake. In Kara-koshun, too, there are basins cut off from connection with the main lake, in which the water is salt; and on the south side of that lake the district which was formerly under water now presents precisely the same appearance as this locality along the southern shore of the ancient Lop-nor.

The contour still continued to rise, although only two feet in the seven miles. Thus, when we encamped at the end of the fourth day, we were two and a half feet above our point of departure. It was beginning to be too much of a good thing! At this rate Kara-koshun would soon lie higher than Lôu-lan!

On the 15th of March shor, shor all day long. It was abomin-

ably monotonous. The weather, however, was beautiful, and at one p.m. the temperature was not higher than 11° C., or 51°.8 Fahr. But our position was becoming rather serious, for we had scarcely anything left to eat. Our rice was all done ; and we had only one little bag of *talkan*, or roasted flour. Except for that, and tea, for the men, and coffee and sugar for myself, we had literally nothing left. The camels were all right as yet ; they could eat up their pack-saddles. We still had plenty of water, though it tasted objectionably of goatskin. However, there were a few pieces of ice still swimming in it, and these were not amiss.

We searched the horizon in vain for the smoke from Tokta Ahun's signal-fire. Towards the end of the day we came across trunks of poplar trees, half buried in the shor. They were drift-wood, which had been carried there when the country was formerly under water. The result of the day's measurement was a drop of barely one foot in ten miles. It would be impossible to find a flatter, leveller region on the face of the earth. Thus we had already passed the watershed—if there was one—and in all probability the contour would now fall away to the southern lake basin.

According to our itinerary of the preceding year, we had barely twelve miles left to Kara-koshun when we started on the morning of the 16th March. Soon after starting we came upon the first indication that we were nearing the shore of this desert ocean, in two or three dead or dying tamarisks. After a while they became more frequent, and were attended each by its favourite associate, a sand-dune, three or four feet high, on the sheltered side. Numbers of wild-duck were out ; but, strange to say, they were very erratic in their movements. Sometimes they flew towards the north, sometimes towards the south ; then again they came from the south-west, and, after circling round, disappeared towards the south-east. What could be the meaning of this ? The result of the day's work was a fall of $7\frac{1}{8}$ feet in exactly ten miles. We were thus well down into the basin of Kara-koṣhun, the southern depression of the Lop desert.

We awoke on the 17th in high spirits : we must now be near our journey's end. The wild-ducks were flying from east to west to the south of us ; we even observed two or three hawks. At the seventeenth pole, which was planted on a sand-dune, the men stopped and pointed southwards, shouting, " Water—water everywhere ! " In fact, we were so near to it that the

nineteenth pole was planted actually in the water itself. How different this northern shore of Kara-koshun was from the place where we struck it the preceding year! The beach was absolutely bare and barren, and bordered by a narrow belt of sand. The lake was perfectly open: there was no kamish, except in the far, far distance. Although the water was decidedly salt, it was at any rate better than the nasty thick "soup" we had in the goatskins.

As soon as we stopped, I sent off Khodai Kullu to the south-west, with instructions to push on day and night without rest until he found Tokta Ahun, who must be somewhere not very far away. There was no sign of a trail beside the lake; consequently he could not have gone past the spot where we struck it. My scout disappeared in the thick haze, taking nothing with him to eat, though there was no fear of his suffering from thirst. Meanwhile we were to remain where we were till he came back.

Once more we lived *à la* Robinson Crusoe. Our first aim was to get hold of something to eat. Shagdur went out with the fowling-piece, and brought back a couple of fat ducks, which we shared in brotherly fashion amongst us. Kutchuk, anxious not to be behind his comrade, said he would try his luck at fishing—if he had a boat. Now I was, as you know, an experienced boat-builder! My water-tight instrument-case, with one-half of the levelling pole and some goatskins lashed on each side of it, formed the principal part of Kutchuk's venture. Then with a spade for his oar, off went Kutchuk paddling across the lake. But he got no fish—the water was too salt, and there was not a scrap of vegetation for the fish to live on.

Whilst Kutchuk was thus risking life and limb, I worked out the results of the day's survey, and found that we had dropped another 21½ inches. Hence, the northern shore of Kara-koshun lay 7½ feet below our point of departure at Lôu-lan. That is to say, in the entire distance of 50½ miles, the fall did not exceed 7½ feet. I had, therefore, not only proved from the relief that a lake *could* have existed in the northern part of the Lop district, but I had proved that one actually did exist there. My survey line was not, of course, absolutely trustworthy; for I ought to have returned to the place of departure, and checked my readings again, until their errors amounted to nil. But the season was too far advanced, and I could not afford the time. My main object—proof of the existence of a depression—was sufficiently established even by this simple survey.

Here, towards evening, the fourth storm burst upon us; it was a good thing it did not come on at noon, and stop our work on the eve of completion, for it proved a long-winded storm, and kept us prisoners for two days and three nights, the air being all the time as thick as muddy water. I was very sorry I had let Khodai Kullu go, especially when the second day came, and we heard nothing of him. Something was clearly amiss. I began to be uneasy. Fortunately Shagdur shot five wild-ducks, which went down capitally, although they were over-plentifully peppered and salted with drift-sand. The time hung fearfully heavy on our hands, and I was consumed with impatience, especially when I thought of the mail-bag which Tokta Ahun had with him.

On the 19th of March our supplies were completely exhausted, and we were ravenously hungry. I had never been on such short commons since those terrible days in the Takla-makan Desert in 1895. Shagdur, when taking a stroll, made an unexpected discovery. A short distance to the west of where we were encamped, he stumbled upon a lake, stretching to the north-west and north, and alongside it observed Khodai Kullu's footsteps. This threw light upon the matter: we were entangled in a labyrinth of shifting lakes. Possibly Tokta Ahun had encountered the same obstacles. Something must be done. How would it be, if we left the others to their own devices, and made our way independently to Abdall, keeping to the east and south of Kara-koshun? But no; we had no provisions, and in two or three days we should be in the most desperate straits. All the same I sent Kutchuk east to reconnoitre. After going about seven miles he came back and reported that he had found some kamish huts, abandoned years before, had climbed a hill, and seen the water disappear in the haze at his feet, and that was all.

CHAPTER IX.

A WANDERING LAKE.

On the morning of the 20th it was perfectly clear to me that we could not any longer count on Khodai Kullu. He had pretty certainly failed to find the others; indeed, he might esteem himself lucky if he succeeded in reaching human beings before he perished of hunger. Accordingly we made haste to quit this inhospitable shore, which we had first beheld with such high hopes. The sky was grey and heavy; the diffused light cast no shadows; the surface of the water was crumpled by a slight south-south-westerly breeze. A narrow fringe of ice, about three-quarters of an inch thick, had formed along the beach; and of this we took half a sackful with us; it would be better than having to swallow down the unpalatable contents of the goat-skins. The camels were well rested, and had light loads, and we travelled pretty fast. The water on our left, the biggest expanse I had seen since I left Kara-koshun, forced us to the north-west and north. But it was shallow; the ducks—thousands of them—were busy a long way out from the shore. On our right was the desert.

After going a few hours I climbed to the back of the riding-camel I had used the year before, so as to command as wide a view as I could, that I might warn the men of any marshes and water-courses that lay in our way. About 80 or 90 paces from the edge of the water we again perceived, amongst a narrow belt of dunes, traces of the presence of human beings—two kamish huts, buried up to the eaves in sand. Against one of them leant a canoe, the fore end projecting some two feet above the sand. This discovery was not without its interest. The huts, the canoe, and the household utensils which were left showed that two or three fishermen's families had lived there, probably twenty or thirty years before. My first thought was, why not make

use of the canoe? So at it the men went with their spades; but when they got about six feet of it clear, they found a gaping hole in its side, so we left it to rot where it was.

Shortly afterwards we turned sharply to the west. Here there were reeds near the edge of the water; and Shagdur, creeping up behind another abandoned hut, let drive at a flock of wild-duck, and managed to bag no less than seven. His return was greeted with shouts of triumph; we were safe for two days longer. But this lake appeared to have no end; its south shore was not visible. For the greater part of the day we followed Khodai Kullu's track, until the lake allowed us to turn to the south-west. Here we found, before we had gone very far, that Khodai Kullu had swung off to the north-west. What on earth was the matter with the man? Had he gone out of his mind? Why should he want to go back into the desert again? At length, upon reaching some salt pools, where there was plenty of kamish for the camels and for firing, we halted for the night.

When, late that night, the haze lifted a little, we again made up big fires of dry tamarisks. They flared up; they crackled; they glowed; they died out—no answer. The night was peaceful and still—not a sound, suspicious or otherwise. No horseman came galloping up to the camp with happy tidings. My impatience and uneasiness grew hour by hour. We no longer counted upon Khodai Kullu. Faisullah was by this, no doubt, safe at Kum-chappgan. But why did we hear nothing of Tokta Ahun? When he left us at Anambaruin-gol he was ordered to meet us here, and ought to have arrived several days ago. Why was he not here? I knew that I could implicitly trust him. I began to wonder if any accident had happened to him, and he had never got back to Charkhlik at all? Or was it nothing more than these strange wandering lakes, which alter so from year to year, that were baffling him? Who could answer these perplexing questions?

The next day we continued in the same direction, skirting the borders of lakes and doubling creeks and bays, the ground all the time being bare steppe. Shagdur went after the wild-duck, and again brought in a couple. At length we reached a fresh-water lake, where the reeds stood thicker than usual, and found ourselves stopped by a narrow watercourse. It was only two or three yards wide, and not at all deep, but the bottom consisted of ooze, so soft and dangerous that we could not dream of trying to take the camels across; and in attempting to go

round it by the south we soon became entirely surrounded on every side by water, except along the narrow path by which we had approached. We wanted to go to the south-west. Nevertheless, the next morning we were forced to turn back and travel towards the north-north-east. Never before had I so distinctly had the impression that Kara-koshun was nothing more than a gigantic marsh—not a real lake at all, but merely a series of wretched depressions, covered with water.

During the night fresh arms were formed, and we had to be up and off in a hurry to escape getting shut in on an island. That would not have inconvenienced *us*, but it would have been fatal to the camels. That strange shore, as hard as brick when it was dry, became as soft as pap when it got under water. Upon reaching a broad channel we again saw Khodai Kullu's footprints; evidently he had swum across it. I wondered what had become of the poor fellow, for it was now five days since I sent him away. Even if he were alive, which I greatly doubted, he would not—indeed, he could not—now return to us; for I had told him that if he delayed too long we should go in the opposite direction—east and south round Kara-koshun.

On the 23rd of March we were still travelling north-east, beside a chain of lakes united by small channels. I rode on a long way in advance of the others, and saw—actually saw with my own eyes—that Kara-koshun was feeling its way back north and north-east towards the basin of the ancient Lop-nor. Could I have a clearer proof of the correctness of the theory I had formed in 1896? It was becoming more and more evident to me that both Tokta Ahun and Khodai Kullu, and possibly also Faisullah, had got completely bewildered by the changes which were now taking place throughout the whole of this region. Its features did not in any way agree with the descriptions which I had given them. Tired and dispirited, I stopped at a point where the creek contracted to seven or eight yards in width, just before it entered a lake. As the bottom of this watercourse consisted of hard blue clay, I thought it a good opportunity to get the camels across. But before beginning the business I sent Shagdur to the north to have a look round. After a good hour's absence he turned up on the east side of the next lake, and with the most excited gestures began to beckon us to go over to him. But I preferred to hear what it was before moving. Shagdur then set off running, and as soon as he came within hailing distance, pointed to the south-west and cried, breathlessly, "Horsemen! horsemen!"

And sure enough there were two mounted men galloping towards us amid a cloud of dust, as hard as their horses could put hoof to ground. We watched them through the glass in a state of the utmost excitement. But I soon recognised them. They were Tokta Ahun and—Chernoff! We were saved!

My good Cossack was so delighted to see me again that he actually trembled, and his cheeks were red with eagerness, he was so anxious to tell me all he knew. Chernoff! Yes, it was Chernoff. As I have already said, the summer before a messenger arrived to tell me that, owing to the unsettled aspect of affairs in Asia, my two West Turkestan Cossacks, Sirkin and Chernoff, were to return at once to Kashgar. But about two months after they arrived there a telegram came from St. Petersburg to Consul-General Petrovsky, commanding the two Cossacks, in the name of the Czar, instantly to report themselves to me wherever I might happen to be. This order arrived on a Saturday afternoon. The Consul summoned the Cossacks, and bade them buy horses and set off next morning. They asked if they might not stay over the Sunday; but, no, an order from the Czar admitted of no delay. Accordingly, early on Sunday morning, they were in the saddle, and rode *viâ* Aksu and Korla to Charkhlik, which they reached after a ride of 48 days, in the end of December. But not finding me there, they had taken the matter quietly, and set about doing something useful. Sirkin took charge of the meteorological observations. Chernoff, meanwhile, went down to the delta of the Lower Tarim and prepared a series of maps of the latest changes which had taken place there. As he was unable to write, he took with him a *mirza*, or scribe, who prepared the drawings. This proved of immense service, the information being most valuable.

As for Tokta Ahun, he also executed his commission to the utmost satisfaction. He had ridden from Anambaruin-gol to Charkhlik, losing on the way only one of the six worn-out horses; had given my letters to Islam to forward; then, after being supplied with provisions and fresh horses, had travelled in company with Chernoff *viâ* Abdall to Kum-chappgan, and so on north-east along the northern shore of the Kara-koshun. There was only one point in which he had not implicitly obeyed my orders. He had only gone two days' journey from Kum-chappgan instead of three; but he was fully exonerated, because he had been hindered by the newly-formed lake which occasioned us so much trouble.

The two men encamped near the fishing-station, where we

Our Camp Beside one of the New Arms from the Lake of Kara-koshun.

struck the lake the year before. There they built a hut, snared wild-duck and caught fish; thus we were plentifully supplied with sheep, poultry, eggs, flour, bread, and maize. Every night after dark they used to light a big fire on the hill, from the top of which I first saw the water of Kara-koshun in the year 1900. But we had been prevented from seeing their fires, and they from seeing ours, by the dust-haze. And yet the distance between their camp and the point where we were first stopped by the water was only two miles. But two miles though it was, it had taken poor Khodai Kullu five days to get to them. The fact was, the two camps were separated by the new, deep, broad arms which were flowing northwards, out of the Kara-koshun; and Tokta Ahun's camp could only be reached either by going right round them or by swimming across them.

For twelve days Chernoff and Tokta Ahun, whilst waiting for our arrival, led an idyllic life—walking, rowing, hunting, and fishing, until one fine day our good Khodai Kullu suddenly emerged out of the desert and put an end to their easy-going existence. The very hour he arrived they packed up and set off, with Khodai Kullu as guide, to look for us—and now they had at length found us.

After talking over and discussing everything that had happened since we parted, we moved towards a pool quite close to our camp of the 20th March, picking up Khodai Kullu on the way. He sat on a clump of grass, and, upon catching sight of me, began to weep bitterly; he was so overcome by the recollection of the adventures he had gone through during the five critical days. On and on and on he had walked, and at last in sheer despair he had set to and swum across several lakes. On the third day he was sitting tired and dispirited on the margin of another lake, when a flock of wild-duck flew over his head. As if by a miracle, one of the ducks dropped just at his feet, with its wing either broken or injured. Like a wild animal he flung himself upon it, and ate it up, bones and feathers and all, alive just as it was. Strengthened by this meal, he pushed on two days longer, until he at length found those he was in search of.

In several places he had come across the trail of Faisullah's caravan, from which he inferred that they were all alive, including the three horses and the three dogs. But at length the trail had turned away from the lake into the desert, as though old Faisullah had suddenly lost his bearings. Where he was gone to we were completely ignorant, and I became exceedingly anxious

about him. His caravan carried everything that was of value to me, except my maps—all my scientific collections, photographic negatives, wood-carvings, and a great part of the MSS. which we had discovered at Lôu-lan. Were all these to be lost? Tokta Ahun, however, assured me that the two parties which he had sent out into the desert in search of Faisullah, one from Kum-chappgan, and the other from Abdall, would be sure to find the old man. Besides, Faisullah was a clever and prudent man.

I gave Khodai Kullu a gratuity in silver for the courage and resource he had shown. He told me, quite calmly, that he was fully determined the whole time that he would *not* turn back, but *would* accomplish what he was bidden do, even though it cost him his life. Ever since he had killed the wild camel, Khodai Kullu's prestige had been rising. After this he was never called anything but *Batir*, or "the Hero." These are the sort of men you want about you; but amongst the Mussulmans they are, at any rate, rare.

We were now at the end of our long wanderings. My good star had not deserted me. My anxiety with regard to the various sections of the caravan was at an end. How delightful it was to rest beside this fresh, translucent water! We stayed there two days, and fared right sumptuously on the ample supplies of the relief expedition; they had brought even tea and tobacco with them. But the best of all was the mail-bag from home. It kept me chained to the inside of my yurt, so that it actually required a special effort to go out and take an observation for latitude. My letters were full of news; but it was very strange that I should be told about the Boxer movement in China in a letter from Stockholm. His Excellency the Swedish Minister for Foreign Affairs warned me of it, so that it was probably fortunate we did not go to Sa-chow when we were so close to it.

This camp, no. CLXX. on my map, was one of the very best throughout the journey. I shall not readily forget it.

This peculiar northerly extension of the Kara-koshun may also to some extent have been caused by the hydrographic relations of the Tarim basin taken as a whole. All the streams of East Turkestan had been unusually high during the preceding summer and autumn, this being no doubt caused by exceptionally heavy falls of snow on the encircling mountains. This circumstance, again, can only be explained by a more comprehensive view of the broad factors of the problem, such as the distribution of the atmospheric pressure and the extent of the

winds, especially the monsoons. In consequence of the more copious flood in the streams, the terminal lakes of the Tarim system had naturally swollen to greater dimensions than usual.

On the 26th we turned our faces towards the north. Both this day and the next the going was difficult. The clay ridges and grooves, or trenches, were all directed towards the north-east, so that we had to cross them each and all in turn diagonally, and the creeks of the new lake all ran like fingers in the same direction, compelling us to turn to every point of the compass to get round them. When at length we had doubled the last of these hindrances, and were able to turn finally to the west

An Offshoot of the Travelling Lake—the White Patches on the Surface of the Water are Foam.

and south-west, we were half-way back to Lôu-lan. Had I had a conception of the way the water was behaving I might have confined my survey to the first half of the distance. About the point where we turned dead forest was quite common ; and some of the poplars and tamarisks still stood upright. Here we were probably skirting the southern shore of the ancient lake of Lop-nor.

In two or three places in this quarter I was surprised to come across old camel-droppings. That these could only be attributed to wild camels was perfectly clear. It showed that those animals were in the habit of crossing the desert, and knew of the exist-

ence of the lakes farther south, though for such swift-footed creatures the distance was really but a trifle.

After we turned south-west we travelled more easily and more quickly, for we were now able to follow the wind-scooped trenches; indeed, for long distances we actually trod in Faisullah's footsteps. If we had had any doubts as to its really being his caravan we were following, they were finally dispelled when we came across Shagdur's brown horse lying dead on the trail. The animal had been opened, and its intestines removed, and the tenderer and better parts of the meat taken away; which showed that the caravan was at the end of its resources.

We stopped on the edge of a newly-formed stream, where the water flowed quite strong towards the north-east. This was pretty certainly the more northerly depression which we crossed when making our survey, and the slight rise between the northern and the southern basins was here totally wanting, or broken down.

On the 28th we continued along the edge of the capriciously wandering water. Here we observed a very interesting phenomenon on the edge of a pool which had formed since Chernoff made his sketch-map of the locality seven days before. The pool was now quite cut off, and was fed by water which trickled out of the ground. Its surface, about twelve acres in extent, was like water boiling in a pot; it bubbled and gurgled as if there were a hot blaze underneath it, and threw up bubbles of air, each of which became the nucleus of a patch of white foam. Sometimes the welling water gushed up several inches high, like a miniature geyser, and the pool splashed as if big fish were rising to its surface. The specific gravity of the water was 1.0036, and to us, who were accustomed to a greater infusion of salt, it tasted almost fresh. The greatest depth of the pool was 7¼ feet, and this little lake had been entirely formed in the course of—one week. Even whilst we stood and watched it, the water lapped over on both sides, giving rise to fresh runnels, which trickled away, penetrating into every cranny and depression of the ground. How far would these new lakes travel before the year was out? Would they get all the way to the ancient Lop-nor? These questions can only be answered after a fresh visit to the locality.

Thus we travelled west, south-east, and east round the lakes, where poor Khodai Kullu had floundered along so bravely with

nothing to eat. When we reached the spot where Faisullah had struck out into the desert, I thought the action looked so hazardous that I sent Shagdur to see where the trail went to. With the help of his compass he jotted it down on a piece of paper for about six miles, and ascertained that the old man had merely made a detour, after which he had continued in the original direction. Had he stuck to the lake side, one day more would have brought him to Tokta Ahun's camp. Next, at the first salt lake beside which we had encamped the year before, we came upon two or three empty preserved food tins. On that occasion we thought it owed its origin to the Shirgeh-chappgan, for it was only a narrow arm, which we waded across without difficulty; but it was now so swollen that we could have readily drowned ourselves in it and the camels as well.

During the night the gulls screamed on the lakes, heralding a storm; and we got it at daybreak. The widespread sheets of water were whipped into foam. Our last day's march around this tiresome lake brought us at last to Tokta Ahun's camp, where we found Tokta Ahun himself quite comfortable, but alone. All the men from Kum-chappgan had returned home, under the belief that we had gone the other way round Kara-koshun. Fortunately they had left behind them two canoes. As we had plenty of provisions except fresh fish, Tokta Ahun, taking his horse, at once went off to fetch some of the latter from Kum-chappgan.

On the 30th of March we were kept indoors the whole day by the storm; but on the following day, although it still continued to blow, we were able to measure the volume of the water which was returning to the ancient lake of Lop-nor. The surface was, however, too rough to venture out in a single canoe; so we lashed our two canoes together side by side. Chernoff and Khodai Kullu were my boatmen. The former, during the time the men were waiting for us, had explored this reedy labyrinth in every direction, and knew exactly where to steer. In spite of that, however, the trip was a very ticklish piece of work. Six days previously Khodai Kullu and Tokta Ahun, when on their way to the hut, had swum across eight considerable streams; but I only succeeded in measuring six, each of them distinct and clearly marked. Their united volume amounted to 1,130 cubic feet in the second, a figure which is certainly too low, for a good deal of the water percolated unseen through the dense reed-beds without my being able to measure it. At any rate, we ascer-

tained that enormous masses of water were on their way to the north. In view of the unexampled flatness of the region, a volume of 100,000,000 cubic feet of water in the 24 hours is sufficient to form a very respectable lake. In the swiftest current the water flowed at the rate of 1¼ miles an hour. Now it is undoubtedly strange that the lake had not advanced more than two days towards the north-east; yet it must be remembered that enormous quantities were being absorbed by the arid ground. The deep sand must first be moistened, then fully saturated, before the restless element was able to secure for itself a sufficiently firm channel along which to flow.

However, I was beginning to feel that I had had enough of these marshes, and began to turn my eyes longingly towards the mountains.

During the last few decennia—that is, since the time of Przhevalsky's visit—Kara-koshun had clearly shown a tendency to dry up. The reeds encroached upon it more and more every year, and the marsh grew less in area. I am convinced that in a few years' time the lake will be found in the locality where it was formerly placed by the Chinese cartographers, and where Baron von Richthofen proved by an ingenious deduction that it must once have been. I have said above sufficient to show that the actual facts are in agreement with Baron von Richthofen's theory. Nor is it surprising that such should be the case in this desert, which my survey proved to be almost perfectly horizontal. While the lake of Kara-koshun, which had existed a long time in its southern half, was being filled up with mud, drift-sand, and decaying vegetation, the arid northern half was being excavated and blown away by the winds, and thus being hollowed out to a deeper level. Now these changes of niveau are determined by purely mechanical laws and local atmospheric conditions; consequently the lake which serves as the terminal reservoir of the Tarim system must be extremely sensitive to their influence. It is a matter of mere physical necessity that the water should overflow and run towards the relatively lower depressions. Then vegetation and animal life, as well as the fishing population, inevitably accompany the water as it migrates, and the old lake-bed dries up. In the future the same phenomena will be repeated again, but in the reverse order, although the laws dictating it will be precisely the same. It will only be then, however, when there exist more abundant materials to go upon, that the length of the period of oscillation

will admit of being determined. All that we now know for certain is that in 265 A.D., in the last years of the reign of the Chinese Emperor Yüan Ti, Lop-nor lay in the northern part of the desert. In fact, Lop-nor is, as it were, the weight which hangs on the pendulum of the Tarim river, and even though a single oscillation should stretch over a thousand years, still, measured by the clock of geologic time, that is comparatively speaking little more than one of our seconds.

On the 1st of April we struck into a part of the country which I already knew from the year before. The only interest attaching to it was the comparison I could now make between my present map and my old map. For instance, the new stream which came from Shirgeh-chappgan now carried a volume of 335½ cubic feet, as compared with a very insignificant quantity in 1900. On the 2nd of April we were met by Niaz Baki Beg, Numet Beg, and our old Mollah, who told us that Faisullah was safe at Abdall, and all the caravan with him.

Upon reaching the lake of Ak-köl, we stopped at sunset to wait for boats. It was a beautiful afternoon, peaceful and cool. Not that we had any cause to complain of the heat, but eight months of winter had made us rather sensitive on this point. At last we heard the splashing of oars and the voices of the boatmen, and up glided a flotilla of five canoes. By means of these we carried our baggage across the Ak-köl, and a tangle of lakes beyond it, and finally emerged upon the big river immediately opposite to Kunchekkan Beg's former dwelling, Kona Abdall, where I visited him in 1896. From there strong arms paddled us up the Tarim. There was a glorious moon, and by its light I continued my mapping. It was one of those enchanting, never-to-be-forgotten trips by moonlight on still, silvery water, like a lovely night in Venice, which I had enjoyed on two or three occasions before on that peaceful stream. It was late when my swift canoe pulled up amid the fierce barking of our dogs, which, however, soon changed to transports of delight when they recognised us.

The next day I measured the volume of the river; it amounted to 5,517 cubic feet in the second, the greatest volume I have recorded anywhere throughout the Tarim system; it was due, as I have already explained, to the cold, snowy winter and the unusually thick formation and long continuance of the ice.

Faisullah gave me an account of all that had happened to him from the day we parted at the ruins of Lôu-lan. He had

been seventeen days on the road, and had made several unexpected hydrographical discoveries, which, however, I cannot now stay to dwell upon.

At ten o'clock in the morning a black storm of the usual character burst upon us like a clap of thunder, sweeping before it everything that was not securely fastened down. The next day was wasted; it was impossible to face such a howling tempest. That was the desert's last lingering good-bye to me, and it lasted 41 hours. When it at length ceased, the air was thick with fine dust. We bought, however, three good camels, making seventeen in all.

Three more days' march through another of the inevitable storms brought us to our headquarters camp at Charkhlik, where we were received on the evening of the 8th of April by a large escort of mounted men, and were by them conducted through the scattered orchards to our serai.

CHAPTER X.

PREPARATIONS FOR TIBET.

I NOW enjoyed a delightful and much-needed rest in the little town on the edge of the desert. And yet rest I can hardly call it, for I went on working from morning till night. There were endless things to arrange, endless preparations to be made, for the last and most difficult part of my programme, the journey right across Tibet. I took up my quarters in a very comfortable serai, near the Chinese *yamen*, or residence of the Governor, on the left bank of the Charkhlik-su.

A public gateway led off a street of grey clay-walled houses into a courtyard, with partly open, partly covered, stalls for the horses and mules. In the opposite wall of the courtyard another gateway opened into a large apartment where the Mussulmans lived, and from which a passage led to the Cossacks' quarters. Beside this last was a smaller room, which Sirkin had already converted into a photographic dark-room. Behind this house lay a large walled-in garden, planted with mulberry trees, poplars, and willows. Here, in a shady spot, the big Mongolian yurt was set up for my use. We always had a watchman posted at the gates of the serai during the night, and another in the garden. In this peaceful retreat, where I was secure from inquisitive eyes, my only companions were the two dogs, Yolldash, and the big black savage Yollbars (tiger), which had been so severely wounded by a wild boar at Yanghi-köll. No stranger durst ever go near him, though with me he was as quiet as a lamb. There was yet another inhabitant of the garden, namely, a stag, a beautiful animal, with big brown eyes, which had been caught young in the forests of the Cherchen-daria, and had been presented to me by Jan Daloi, the Governor of the place. The stag was quite tame, and let me feed him with bread. The first two or three days, but only the first two

or three, I did rest in the armchair which Islam Bai had knocked together for me whilst at the grottoes of Temirlik. And yet even then I was not idle : I spent my time reading the big budget of letters which the jighit, Yakub, had brought me a little while back from Kashgar. The first to be devoured were, of course, the letters from home, from those near and dear to me ; then came a pile of Swedish newspapers, and, lastly, some books by my favourite authors—Selma Lagerlöf, Rudyard Kipling, and several others. The evenings were devoted to the development of the negatives which I had taken during the last four months. In this work Sirkin proved exceedingly useful, in getting the

The Stag. On the Left a Chinaman, Chernoff, and Turdu Bai, and on the Right Islam Bai.

dark-room ready, and in tidying it up afterwards, in mixing the different chemicals, and in drying and printing the plates. Besides that, he looked after the meteorological observatory, which was placed on the flat roof, well protected against the sun. Meanwhile it was Chernoff's duty to look after everything that concerned the caravan, as well as to provide and cook my meals, though Cherdon was my body-servant.

But this was only until the 12th of April, when I gave the two Buriat Cossacks a special and important task to perform. When I made my big journey across Tibet, I intended, if possible, to try and get into Lassa (Lhasa), disguised as a Mongol. For that purpose it was necessary that I should have a complete

The Yurt in the Orchard at Charkhlik.

outfit of Mongolian clothes and appurtenances of travel—in fact, an outfit including everything that the Mongols are accustomed to take with them when they pilgrimage to the holy city. Shagdur was the only man in my caravan who had any knowledge of my plans, so I sent him to Kara-shahr to buy what I wanted. It was a long journey, and would take him a month to go there and back, so I let Cherdon go with him for company.

The days slipped past, and yet there still remained plenty to do; but I soothed myself with the thought that it was too early to go up into the mountains. For one thing, the grass was only just beginning to sprout down here, and it would be fully six weeks later before it showed in the higher regions. In the meantime our animals were all resting, and gathering strength for the hard times which almost certainly awaited them. We gave them as much kamish and maize as they could eat, and they were capitally looked after by their attendants. Turdu Bai was the captain of the camels, and answerable for their condition. This, the *élite* corps of the caravan, was increased by a score new camels, which Islam Bai bought in Charkhlik; so that, when we at length started, we had no less than 39, of which, however, three were young ones. The last of these was born on the 6th of May, and I at once went to see it. The little creature could scarcely stand on its long, tottering legs, and gazed about it with an air of observant curiosity at the restless bustle of the scene into which it had been thus suddenly transported. Yet, within a few days, it was running about the stable courtyard, playing, and quite at home, and soon became a general favourite. During the day the camels were taken out of the town to graze, but at nightfall were driven back to an open square just outside the serai, and given a good meal of maize, poured out on mats. At the same time the horses and mules had their corn in their mangers. On warm days we gave them a bath in a big pond, surrounded by shady willows, which was immediately outside the entrance-gate to the serai, a proceeding which was always witnessed by a crowd of curious onlookers.

The support of my now numerous and continually increasing caravan soon began to cost a good deal of money. I had to feed all the men whose names were enrolled on my caravan, and make them advances of wages. Every day we killed at least one sheep, and rice, bread, and eggs disappeared wholesale. But, on the other hand, it was an important matter that we all,

men and animals alike, should be well set up for the hard days before us. I will introduce the new members of our company as I go along. Even before our return to Charkhlik, Islam Bai had laid in stores sufficient to equip the caravan for a ten months' journey, consisting of rice, flour, and *talkan*. This last, burnt flour, when mixed with water, is eaten like porridge. For flesh meat we intended to rely upon the weapons of our hunters, but all the same I resolved, when we started, to buy a flock of sheep and drive them on with us. For my own use I had a couple of hundred tins of preserved food, which Colonel Saitseff had sent me from Osh. But I soon grew so sick of them that I turned over the greater part to the Cossacks, except preserved fruits, vegetables, and soups, which were always good.

We bought a large supply of maize in sacks for the camels and horses ; it was a heavy load to carry. I thought at first of buying asses, for they were cheap in Charkhlik, only costing ten sär, or 30s. each. There was, however, one objection to this : an ass caravan big enough for the purpose would require at least half-a-dozen men to look after it, and after the poor beasts were all dead, we should have these men hanging about our necks with nothing for them to do, and yet should have to feed them. I decided, therefore, to hire 70 asses for two months. They cost me, it is true, five sär each the month, or practically as much as if I had bought them ; but in this case the ass-drivers would have to find their own way back to Charkhlik when I had done with them. I arranged this business with an honest old fellow named Dovlet Caravan-bashi, from Bokhara, who did excellently well, though he made very little money out of the transaction, for nearly all his animals died before they got back.

On the 28th April my old servant, Mollah Shah, arrived from Cherchen. I could not possibly do without him, for he had accompanied Mr. Littledale in his journey to Tengri-nor and Ladak, and consequently knew more about the country and its resources than anybody else. Every day men came to me in the garden asking me to employ them, but my company was already made up. I did not want too many men. Indeed I had made up my mind that as soon as we were across the Arka-tagh, and the animals had become accustomed to their work, I would send back some of those I had already engaged. Amongst others who came to visit me was Aldat's old father ; I gave him a present of money. Jan Daloi, the

A Corner of the Stable-Yard in our Serai. Sirkin seated on the Rice-Sacks, Turdu Bai standing in Front of the Dromedary.

Amban or Governor of Charkhlik, had gone to Kara-shahr on official business, but his little six-year-old son often used to come to see me. Both in speech and bearing he showed that refined, elegant breeding which is characteristic of cultured Chinese. I gave the boy sweetmeats and illustrated newspapers, besides a number of trifles, with which he was immensely delighted, and in return he used to bring me fruit or send bundles of fresh clover for my horses. But in the beginning of May the little chap died of the measles, and his poor father reached home just one day too late.

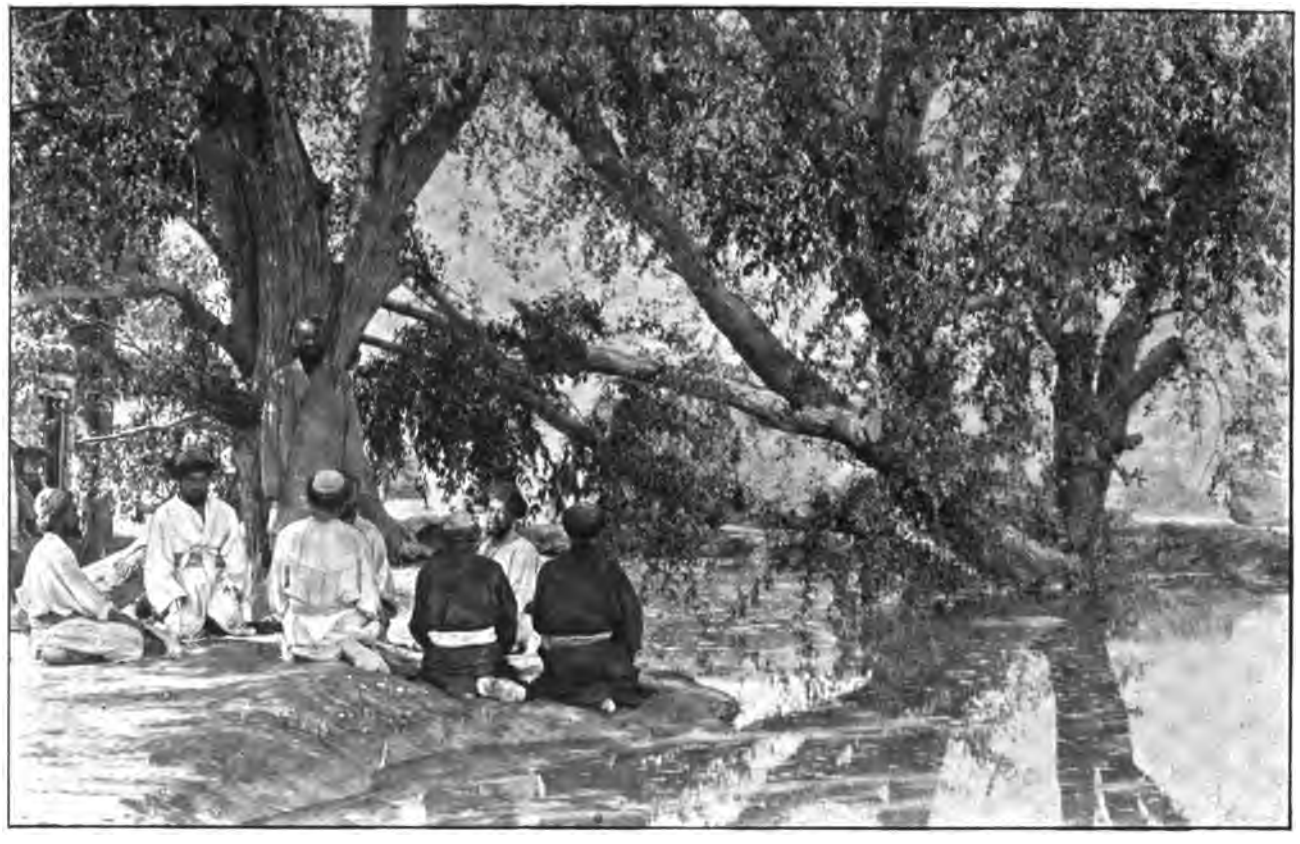
The weather was splendid: there were storms almost every

Sirkin and Chernoff with the two Baby Camels.

day, which kept the air fresh and cool. Even as early as the end of April the temperature went up to 25°.0 C., or 77°.0 Fahr., and down to 12°.0 C., or 53°.6 Fahr. The atmosphere was so thick with dust that we could not see the sun, and of an evening it sometimes grew so cold that I had to have a brazier to warm the yurt. But during the day I enjoyed listening to the wind whistling through the mulberry and plum trees. This stay in Charkhlik recalled vividly to my mind the month I spent in 1896 in the peaceful garden at Khotan, just before I started for my journey through the north of Tibet. But by the beginning of May it was decidedly warm; on the first of the month the thermometer registered 32°.7 C., or 90°.9 Fahr., in the shade. The atmosphere was still and bright, so that we were able to

see the snow-fields which crowned the loftiest summits of the Astyn-tagh.

But the days were slipping past, and it was getting time to start. The baggage was divided and packed into boxes and sacks, which were lashed to the pack-saddles and placed ready to be lifted on to the animals' backs. When these were all arranged in a long row, I was quite dismayed at the sight; but Turdu Bai assured me that the animals could easily carry them. With the view of lightening the load as much as possible, I had already weeded out everything that could possibly be spared, including the scientific collections, such as the geological specimens, skeletons of animals, botanical specimens, and archæological finds from Lôu-lan. These things, which made up eight substantial camel loads, were to go to Kashgar, to be taken charge of by Consul-General Petrovsky. Who was there I could put in charge of such an important caravan? Should I entrust it to the tender mercies of the Chinese? No, not for worlds. I was thinking of writing to Khalmet, the aksakal of Korla, when the difficulty was solved in a very simple and quite unexpected way. One afternoon, when I was alone in my yurt, Islam Bai came to me and begged that he might take my collections to Kashgar. I was quite taken aback at his wanting to leave me just then, when the real difficulties and dangers of the journey were beginning, but answered without more ado, "Yes." He urged, as a reason for wanting to go, that he was getting old and tired, and was afraid he could not be of so much use to me as I should expect. It was very hard to part from him; but I had already found out that he did not like the Cossacks, and was pretty stern with the Mussulmans, amongst whom he maintained an exemplary discipline. I had a great deal to thank him for, and as a proof of my confidence, made the following arrangement with him. He was to take my collections to Kashgar, through Korla, Kuchar, and Aksu, as far as Korla by camels, and the rest of the way by *arabas* (Turkestan carts), and was to spend two months on the road. In addition to paying him the wages due to him, some 300 roubles (about £32) in gold, I defrayed all the expenses of his journey, both for himself and the animals, and gave him letters of recommendation in each of the large towns he was to pass through. From Kashgar he might go back to his home in Osh, and stay there five months, then return to Kashgar and do something for me which Consul-General Petrovsky would tell him about. This



In the Shade of the Willows beside the Serai Reservoir at Charkhlik.

was to meet me at Ladak with a large sum of money and my post-bag, which by that time would, no doubt, be a large one. This mark of my confidence not only flattered Islam, it reconciled us both to the bitterness of parting.

Old Faisullah accompanied him to Kashgar. He was tired and afraid of the rarefied atmosphere up in the mountains. He had served me faithfully, and in an exemplary manner, for two years, so I gave him a large sum of money and a riding-horse. The other men tried in vain to induce him to go with us, for he was a general favourite. Islam's departure, however, was viewed with nothing but the liveliest satisfaction.

They started on the 5th of May with eight camels, three horses, and three extra men, who were engaged to accompany them as far as Korla. It was a very stormy day, and at the end of the very first lane their caravan disappeared in a thick cloud of dust. During the past year I had not seen much of Islam Bai; he had always remained as caravan-bashi at headquarters whilst I was absent on the different excursions. Nobody had lodged any complaint against him; but now that he was gone I soon noticed a difference. The men were cheerful, and went about their work with pleasure, and were happy and contented.

I sent with Islam Bai a very heavy post-bag. One letter, to my father and mother, was no less than 216 pages long, quite a book in fact. Besides which there were long letters to Oscar, King of Sweden, and to the Czar of Russia. I also wrote to several of my friends at home, amongst others to Baron Adolf Nordenskiöld. The letter reached him a few days before he died. He was one of those friends whom nothing but death can take from you. Another important missive was addressed to Lord Curzon, Viceroy of India, to be forwarded by Mr. Macartney from Kashgar. I told his Excellency that I expected, towards the end of the year, to be at Leh in Ladak, and begged that I might be allowed to lift in that town a sum of £200. I also hinted at the possibility of a short visit to India, and asked permission, in that case, to take one of my Cossacks with me. The kind answer which I received to this letter belongs to a later chapter of this book.

CHAPTER XI.

THE LAST OF ISLAM BAI.

THE route I chose for reaching the Tibetan highlands led up the narrow gorge of the Charkhlik-su, a road which no European had ever tried before, but it was a road that was absolutely impossible for camels and extremely difficult for pack horses. Hence, I had to make this arrangement. The big caravan, led by Chernoff, Cherdon (when he returned), and Turdu Bai, was to go by way of Tattlik-bulak and Bagh-tokay, until it reached the west shore of the Lower Kum-köll, whilst I, followed by only a few men, ascended by the nearer, but more difficult, route up the glen.

On the 8th of May everything was ready for the start; the loads, some eighty in number, were arranged in long rows outside the big gate, and were soon swung up on to the animals' back. It was an immense caravan, the biggest I have ever led, the biggest, in fact, any European has ever led into the interior of Tibet. It was divided into several sections, which filed off one after the other. First, my boxes and trunks, then the men's belongings, then the tent and the boat, and after them the different stores. How much easier it is for an expedition by sea, or one that starts not very far from the coast, to get its collections home; but in the interior of Asia, every single object, from the very beginning of the journey, has to be carried many hundreds of miles, and under the most unfavourable conditions, on the backs of camels or horses. The loads have to be taken off and put on again every morning and evening, week after week, and month after month. And had it not been for the great kindness of the Dalai Lama, I never should have got out of Tibet the collections which I made during this, the journey that was just beginning.

I sent on with the caravan the big, roomy Mongolian yurt,

At Charkhlik the Day before the Start.

and so had to make shift with a smaller one, which consisted of a score of staves, the smoke-ring at the top, and a few white felts. This was my " house " all the way to Ladak. When the men moved my things from the one yurt to the other they found underneath one of the boxes a big, ugly scorpion, of a straw-yellow and grey colour. It had probably been keeping me company the whole time, but, strange to say, never did me any harm. On the other hand, once when one of the men was giving straw to the horses, he was severely bitten by a scorpion, and had to keep his bed for a couple of days.

Away went the caravan then. The older camel-foals followed their mothers, but the youngest was packed in felts, and hoisted up between two boxes on the back of my old riding-camel. His mother followed immediately behind him, and was very uneasy until she discovered where he was. The horses, which had put on flesh whilst resting, played fine pranks when they got out upon the road. They flung off their loads, and broke loose, and galloped away; but as they only carried sacks of maize and such like, no harm was done. The long train of baggage animals, winding away from our quiet serai, and the shade of the willows, to the tinkling of their own bells, the shouts and cries of the men, the screaming of the camels, and the neighing of the horses made quite an imposing spectacle. As I stood and watched them I was uplifted with pride at being the owner of such a magnificent caravan, and yet my mind was full of melancholy and sorrowful reflections, for I feared—I feared this would be a fatal march for most of them! And in point of fact it did turn out to be the hardest and most difficult journey that I have ever performed. Two or three of the men died, and all the rest, myself included, were utterly worn out when we reached the other side of Tibet. In fact, I was, myself, two or three times nearer death's door than when I so nearly perished of thirst in the Takla-makan Desert in 1895. Then my sufferings did not last more than a couple of weeks, but in Tibet it was a matter of daily occurrence for weeks together. I would rather cross the Desert of Takla-makan ten times than make another journey like that through Tibet.

Chernoff was in supreme command of the caravan. Turdu Bai was head of the camel caravan. Their instructions were to go first to Abdall, and thence follow the well-known trail up into the mountains. At Abdall they were to buy fifty sheep, and wait for Cherdon, who was on his way back from Kara-

shahr. The stag went with them, following the camels like a dog. And they had seven dogs, amongst them Malenki and Malchik, both of which had crossed the Desert of Gobi with us.

After they were gone the courtyards were empty, and the serai felt quite lonely and deserted. Sirkin now acted as my body servant, and Li Loyeh was cook, while Mollah Shah looked after the horses. These were the only three men I retained with me. Yolldash was, as always, the faithful protector of my yurt.

It only remained to send off the ass caravan. They were to travel across the Ovraz-sai, by way of Kara-chokka, and meet the big caravan at Bagh-tokay. On the morning of the 13th old Dovlet, Caravan-bashi, was ready, his seventy asses laden with maize, and his ten subordinates supplied with provisions and pelts. And so off they went, too, the *tross*, or camp-followers. My forces were now more broken up than they had ever been. Here was I in Charkhlik; the big caravan was on its way to Abdall; the ass caravan on the way to the Astyn-tagh; Shagdur had not yet returned from Kara-shahr; and Islam Bai was to spend the hottest months of summer carrying my collections to Kashgar. I felt like a general who has to keep his finger on each detachment of his army.

At noon on the 14th of May, a man from the village of Lop arrived with a message from Shagdur, reporting that all was well, but that Shagdur's horses were exhausted. Accordingly, Sirkin set about getting three fresh horses ready to go and meet his comrade; but before he got outside the gate Shagdur and his little caravan rode in. Cherdon had received my orders at Chegghelik-uy, and, taking a canoe, had hurried to Abdall. Shagdur had performed his task splendidly. Not only had he brought a complete Mongol equipment for our pilgrimage to the holy city, but he was also accompanied by a real living lama, Shereb Lama, twenty-seven years old, a native of Urga, but belonging to a temple outside Kara-shahr. He was dressed in his red, priestly garb, most like a long nightgown, held together round the waist by a yellow girdle, and on his head wore a Chinese skull-cap. I gave him a very friendly greeting, so that from the first moment he might feel himself at home, and I at once began to brush up my rusty Mongolian, and before many weeks were past I was able to talk quite fluently with the Lama, as we generally called him. This man became the most interesting figure in our company. In the course of two or three days he grew quite confidential, and always used to bring his

little worries to me. Indeed, he was ready to lay down his life for me—in fact, it was a miracle he did not lose it for my sake. He had returned from Lassa only the year before, having spent some time there studying the holy books in two of the temples. He had been accompanied by another lama from Kara-shahr, and on the way there had seen Kozloff's expedition in Tsaidam. This was the only time in the course of my journey that I heard anything about my Russian friend.

Upon being approached by Shagdur, Shereb Lama had at

Shereb Lama on Golden Ears, with Yollbars on a Cord.

once shown himself ready to accompany the Buriat Cossacks to Lassa, and had talked in such a high strain of the glories of the holy city that Shagdur was simply dying to get there. All the same he had not been free from suspicion, and asked whether a "Russian" was going with them; because, if so, he could have nothing to do with the expedition. It would be as much as his life was worth. In reply Shagdur had protested that no "Russian" was going with him. Putting Lassa on

one side, our Lama was quite ready to go wherever I wanted him, and would be satisfied with a salary of two yambas (£20) for as long as I liked. At different times our Lama told me various things about the holy city and the pilgrimages to it. Amongst other things he said that at a distance of ten days' journey, it was surrounded by a ring of frontier guards, who minutely examined every caravan, as well as every solitary horseman, that arrived. In short, they stopped everybody, allowing nobody to proceed until their passes had been examined at Lassa, and permission given for them to do so. The big Mongol caravan which had passed our camp at Temirlik the year before had been detained ten days, solely because of a rumour that our caravan was on the border of the country of the Tsaidam Mongols, and the Tibetans were apparently afraid some undesirable person might be with them.

Shagdur also brought two other travellers with him, both of them old acquaintances. One was Ördek, the man who discovered the temple in Lôu-lan ; the other was Khalmet Aksakal from Korla. Thus our little company was increased by a very interesting quartette, and our spirits again rose. Shagdur gave me an account of his mission, presented his accounts, and returned me the balance of the money I had given him, which was about one-half. Any other Asiatic would of course have put it in his pocket ; but Shagdur was an honest and an honourable man. The very idea of stealing would have seemed to him utterly absurd. Ördek was now quite well again, and begged in the most touching way that he might go with me wherever I was going, and under any conditions I chose. When he left me the year before, he had done so under the pretext that he was suffering from a malignant disease ; but he now told me that that was not true. The real cause was Islam Bai had threatened to kill him if he dared to show himself at Temirlik. The clouds seemed to be gathering about poor Islam now that he was gone ! However, I engaged Ördek on the same terms as before, and ordered him to follow after the asses to Kum-köll.

Then it was Khalmet Aksakal's turn ; but before he began, I asked him if he would do me a great favour, and of course he was quite ready to do it, namely, lend me ten yambas of silver, which at the existing rate of currency was equivalent to £100 ; and at the end of an hour he counted out the silver pieces in my tent. Without this augmentation of my " treasury," my position would have been extremely awkward when I reached

the south of Tibet. At my dictation Khalmet Aksakal wrote a letter in Jaggatai Turki to Consul-General Petrovsky, and I signed it. This was a bill upon him for the amount named, to be repaid at the time stated upon it.

At last everything was ready, and we were to start the next morning, the 15th of May; but fate decreed otherwise. At five o'clock in the morning it began, by way of a change, to pour with rain, and the thunder rumbled in the mountains—a suitable background to the sad surprise that awaited me that evening.

Fresh clouds were gathering round the head of the unfortunate Islam Bai. Khalmet Aksakal complained that Islam had borrowed twenty-seven sär (about £5 5s.) of him in Korla, and when he reminded him of the debt, Islam had abused him and jeered at him. He then went on to say that he had good reason to believe that I also had been cheated. I did not understand what he meant. Islam Bai! Impossible! The man who had shared my destinies for five years, who had looked death in the face at my side in the desert, who had exhibited so many proofs of devotion, who had been the recipient of so many favours, who had higher wages than any of the rest, who wore my king's gold medal for his fidelity and honesty—impossible! I could not, I would not believe it. But upon my making cautious enquiries at Charkhlik certain things came to light which I durst not ignore. At Temirlik Shagdur saw him buying 165 sär (about £33) worth of gold from the gold hunters of Bokalik, but had not interfered, for he naturally assumed it was done by my command. Sirkin and Ördek had been cheated, the one out of 16 sär (about £3 3s.), the other out of 10 sär (£2); but neither had cared to worry me with complaints. The real truth of the matter may be said to have been brought to my knowledge by a mere accident. I had commissioned Khalmet Aksakal to buy sugar and other commodities, and send them to us. When I got back to headquarters and examined his account, it struck me as being excessively high, and in spite of all Islam's explanations, he was bound to admit that it was 23 sär (£4 10s.) too much. Thereupon I sent for Osman Bai, Khalmet Aksakal's brother, who was a merchant in Charkhlik, and gave him a bit of my mind, telling him that his brother was a dishonest man. Osman defended him, and besought me by all that was holy not to believe the slander. When he found he could not move me, he sent a special messenger to his brother

at Korla, advising him to come without loss of time, or he would suffer very serious injury. So here he was, come back with Shagdur. When the little party met Islam near Tikkenlik, Islam was greatly disconcerted, and said that he had been ordered to tell the Cossacks that I had altered my plans, and that they must take the road through Abdall and Chimen if they wanted to find me. If they had believed him, they would not have met me until they reached Kum-köll, in the beginning of June. Islam's idea was, of course, to get a good start on the road to Kashgar; but the Buriats, like true soldiers, had obeyed orders. They knew that they were never to do anything without written or verbal orders from myself, and, fortunately, as it happened, I had sent a letter to Shagdur a few days before through the Chinese post, and so he took no notice of Islam's intrigues, but came straight back to Charkhlik.

The preliminary investigation which I now made into all these things delayed us two or three days longer, and when we did at length make a start, the Aksakal accompanied us the first day out. Upon his return to Korla he took with him a letter to the Consul-General, requesting him to arrest Islam Bai, who was a Russian subject, immediately he arrived at Kashgar, and have all his effects examined. He would, of course, seize all the Chinese silver, as well as all the gold, he found amongst them.

But before relating what happened to Islam in Kashgar, I will first show that he fully deserved the punishment he brought upon his own head. As soon as I reached Kum-köll, and joined the caravan, I called my men before me and examined them one by one. With only one exception they had all been cheated out of money, some more, some less; altogether they had been done out of 12 yambas (£120). Chernoff was the only one amongst them who had not been cheated. It also came out that Islam Bai had robbed me of about 9 yambas (£90), the greater part of it when he bought the last batch of camels. At Yanghi-köll, too, I had bought a large supply of *chapans* (Turkestan cloaks), furs, and boots to give to my men. These things had certainly been distributed to them; but Islam had, I found, made them pay for them, and had put the proceeds into his own pocket. It is, I confess, strange that I never observed I was being deceived in this rascally way, but the matter is easy enough to explain. In the first place all payments from my exchequer were properly booked, and nothing was ever stolen

from me directly. Islam was too clever for that. But the payments for every big purchase of stores, camels, and horses, as well as the men's wages, went through Islam's hands, so that he had an opportunity to make deductions, and give the purveyors less than they were entitled to. There was never any leakage in my exchequer. I always knew how much was paid out and how much was left in, and the amounts always tallied. It was the poor natives who suffered.

You will perhaps think it inconceivable that none of the men who were cheated ever complained to me; and, indeed, I am myself astonished, when I look back, that they did not. But Islam was a big, strong fellow, and the Mussulmans stood in great awe of him. In fact, they feared him as they would an Asiatic despot, and never dared to say a word, but held their tongues and accepted whatever he chose to give them, especially as, I heard at Kum-köll, he threatened to break the head of any man who dared to complain to me. As long as he was amongst them, therefore, they were afraid to speak, but now that he was gone the truth came out. "Oh, God! how many there are," they cried, "who have had to weep because of him!"

On the ferry-boat, and across the Desert of Cherchen, the only occasions when Islam Bai worked under my own eye, he was the same steady, trusty servant that he had been all through my journeys in 1893-97. It was for this reason that I chose him to take charge of my headquarters camps, and did not take him with me on my long excursions. When I returned from them nobody made any complaints, everything seemed to be in the best of order. The circumstance that we were generally separated will explain to a large extent why it was I never noticed any irregularities. Besides, I should never have suspected Islam Bai. I placed the very highest confidence in him; to that extent I am answerable for his misfortune. Psychologically, I soon unriddled the causes of his fall. For three years he had always been the chief man in my caravan. From being a simple groom with a horse-caravan that plied between Osh and Kashgar, I had promoted him to be caravan-bashi, and out of gratitude for this he had served me with exemplary devotion. During this present journey also he had been my right-hand man until the arrival of the Cossacks. They were, of course, much more useful than Islam, and I naturally valued their society more. Hence, while the Cossacks were employed on more personal services to myself, Islam looked after the Mussulmans

and superintended the harder work of camp-life. He was piqued at being thrust into the background by "unbelievers," and I have no doubt he reasoned within himself in this way: "If I am to give way to them, I will at least have some recompense." And so he began his peculations at Yanghi-köll, and continued them all the time we were at Charkhlik. I was very sorry for the poor fellow, and made up my mind that I would endeavour, as far as possible, to mitigate his punishment, especially as Mussulmans generally exaggerate in their accusations. Yet, even though only the half of what they charged him with were true, it was sufficient so send him to Siberia. But I did not forget that in the Takla-makan Desert he had saved for me 23 yambas (say over £200), and on numerous other occasions had rendered me great and invaluable services.

But in the meantime several other disagreeable stories came to light, which made me completely indifferent to his fate. At Yanghi-köll he had taken three young "wives," one of whom, a daughter of Mirab, had cost him 100 sär (£15-£20) at a time when he had not received more than 30 sär of his wages. During the twelve days he stayed in Cherchen, whilst I made my forced ride to Andereh, he had taken another wife, and now again in Charkhlik he had "married" yet another. These ladies he had dismissed from favour one after another, as he moved from place to place, and now that he was starting finally for Kashgar, he washed his hands of them all. The worst side of this hateful business was that all the time he had his own lawful wife and five children at home at Osh. Now it is an expensive business to maintain five wives. In the first place, the lady had to be bought for ready money; then she had to be dressed, and her taste for Chinese silks and so forth had to be gratified; and, finally, she, and perhaps also her parents, had to be supported. This last would of course be readily accomplished with the aid of my stores, so that it would seem to have been I who paid the piper, and not Islam.

Perhaps I had better give here the end of his story. As soon as he arrived at Kashgar, Consul-General Petrovsky examined his effects, but failed to find much ready money. Such as he did find, however, was restored to those from whom it had been taken. Islam was allowed to retain his freedom, but was forbidden to leave Kashgar. When I arrived at that city in May, 1902, he was still unemployed. He came out as far as Yappchan to meet me, and flung himself at my feet, bathed in tears. I

was heartily sorry for the man, he looked so pale and haggard, and realised that he had ruined his life. I earnestly besought him, at his trial, which was about to take place in Kashgar, to keep strictly and faithfully to the truth. If he did so, he should escape punishment; but if he lied I should without further consideration leave him to the tender mercies of the Russian law. He promised he would follow my advice. Had he behaved as well on this journey as on the former, he would have been a man of consequence in his own native town. His name was already known throughout the whole of Central Asia, but now it would be synonymous with reprobation. When the trial came on, and the witnesses were examined, Islam was cold and hard, and stubbornly denied every point of the accusation. He could not be brought to admit even the most obvious peccadillo, but swore that it was all a base calumny from beginning to end. I reminded him that it was in his own interest to confess, but all to no purpose. Not a voice was raised in his defence. He was ordered to report himself to Colonel Saitseff at Osh, the town where, according to the Russian law, the sentence was to be pronounced. He arrived there shortly after I did, but again denied everything. As by his thefts he had offended against the Russian Criminal Code, and by his loose conduct transgressed against the *Sheriet*, or customary law of the Mohammedans, he was declared worthy of banishment to Siberia; but his actual punishment was reduced to three months' imprisonment. At my special intercession, this was still further reduced to 14 days, for he still had his co-religionists to reckon with. The Russian authorities had promised to allow him the privilege of wearing a gold embroidered *khalat*, in honour of the services he had rendered to me; this, and all other dignities and honours, he had forfeited by his arrogance and folly. This was the end of Islam's saga. I never saw him again.

The moral of the whole story is—never trust a Mussulman. You would think that after a man had served you faithfully for so many years, and been the recipient of so many favours, you could trust him with untold gold. But not so the Mohammedans; they never forget they are serving an "unbeliever." From the moral point of view, these Central Asiatics stand at a low level; but they must not be judged too severely; their conditions of life are exceptionally hard. The Mongols stand incomparably higher than they do, and when you have the good

fortune to be accompanied by an escort of Cossacks, you need only employ Mohammedans for the more laborious tasks. Several of my Mohammedan servants, however, such as Turdu Bai, Kutchuk, Khodai Kullu, and Ördek, were first-rate fellows; but they were never exposed to severe temptation.

IX.

Across Tibet from North to South.

Travelling Amongst the Clouds.

CHAPTER XII.

ACROSS THE BORDER RANGES TO THE KUM-KÖLL.

On the 17th of May I was at last able to take the saddle again for a full year's further wandering through the vast wastes of Central Asia. I set forth with fresh courage and high expectations to explore the most inaccessible regions of the continent If I succeeded in my plans there would remain, relatively speaking, little of that part of the world which I had not visited. I hoped much from this journey, but was fully aware that it would prove to be the most difficult of any I had yet undertaken. Yet somehow difficulties have their attractions. In the midst of the hard and unremitting labour which each day brought with it I was stimulated by the thought of the adventures which awaited me "Over de höje Fjælde" (across the mountains high).

But before we left the hospitable little town on the edge of the desert we made an unpleasant and disconcerting discovery. On the afternoon of the day before we were to start there arrived a caravan of ten Mongol pilgrims from Tarbagatai, with eleven horses and twelve camels, who pitched their tents in the grove a short distance from the bazaar. Shagdur and our Lama had met them in Kara-shahr, and knew that they were bound for Lassa, and the Mongols, too, were fully aware that there was a big caravan somewhere in the neighbourhood, for two or three of them spoke Turki. We could not of course start without being seen. When Sirkin rode past their camp with the pack-horses, they asked him point-blank where he was going to, and he answered that he was on his way to Ladak and Kashgar. Shagdur and the Lama and I were most anxious not to be seen. The first two started early in the morning, and made a wide detour to the west, while I struck up the river-bed, accompanied by Khalmet Aksakal and that worthy old

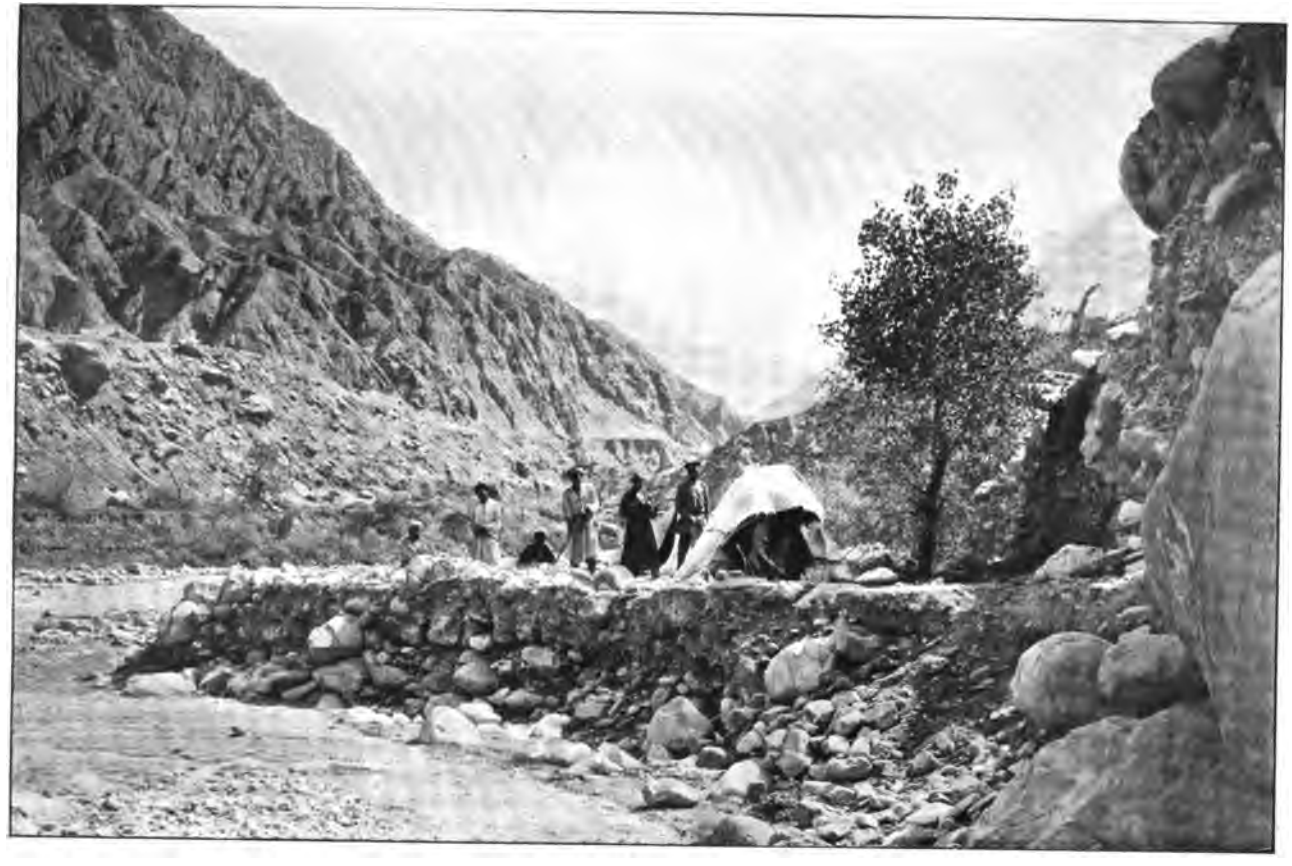
gentleman Togdasin Beg, of Charkhlik—he who had guided us through the bed of the Ettek-tarim. As soon, however, as we got out of sight of the trees of the oasis we joined forces with Shagdur and the Lama. The Mongols had not, at any rate, seen me, so that if we should meet again under critical circumstances, they would be unable to identify me.

But why all this needful precaution against a band of peaceful Mongols, who would not harm even a cat? The reason was they would reach Lassa before we did, and would unfailingly report that we were coming. It is true, their camels were very much done up, and it would take them a long time to get to Tsaidam, where they would, as usual, exchange their animals for horses. But, even allowing for that, they would travel easier and faster than we should, for we were intending to cross the very worst parts of Tibet. And, in spite of our precautions, my forebodings proved true.

The caravan with which I now crossed the northern ranges of the Kwen-lun system consisted of Shagdur, Sirkin, Mollah Shah, and Li Loyeh, together with the Lama and a guide, and we had twelve horses and the dog Yolldash. The mountains towered in front of us in overpowering majesty; south-east was the throat of the glen out of which the Charkhlik-su emerged, and to the south stretched the Kurruk-sai and the Korumluk-sai, which we had first to traverse. The glen by which the river pierced the northernmost range of the Astyn-tagh was too deep and rough to be ascended. The sun burned, and the gnats were hungry; but they disappeared as soon as we reached the barren, desolate country which ran up to the foot of the mountains. In the distance, on the left, we perceived a few solitary horsemen watching us: they were Mongols.

The first place we camped at was called Yiggdelik-tokai, on the left bank of the Charkhlik-su. The water was a muddy red, and foamed along at the bottom of a trench 130 feet deep, hemmed in by precipitous cliffs of gravel-and-shingle. We reached the stream by means of a break-neck path down the cliffs. Here, in spite of the violent storm which came on in the afternoon, accompanied by a considerable drop in the temperature, Khalmet Aksakal and Togdasin Beg, who had hitherto been our guides, turned back and left us.

Next morning it was fresh and cool, and we found it expedient to don warmer clothing. Soon after starting we entered the echoing gorges of the Stony Valley, having on either hand



Our Camp in the Glen of the Charkhlik-su.

cliffs of granite, striped black or red, and hard, dark-coloured schists. The prospect was for the most part bounded by bare, jagged peaks, though every now and again we obtained, up the successive side-glens, a magnificent panorama of mountains, rising higher and higher, one behind the other—a chaos of pinnacles, summits and mountain groups, with picturesque snowfields hanging at intervals from their shoulders. The bottom of the glen was littered with blocks of gravel-and-shingle, and fragments of granite of various sizes, which made riding irksome. Tamarisks and wild briars abounded, and at one place, Tograk-bulak, there were a few solitary, but beautifully green, poplars. The rain during the night had given rise to a rippling brook. I was completely fascinated by the bold and sublime features of the landscape. After our long winter amid the monotonous and sterile deserts, it was perfectly delightful to let our eyes rest again upon the ever-changing variety of the mountains, to hear our voices flung back by the echoing cliffs, and to feel our lungs expand with the pure crisp mountain air, free from all admixture with the everlasting dust and sand.

Sometimes the glen was so narrow that we had to climb over the low buttresses which jutted out at the side. We were now travelling east, and after riding over a detached group of heights, we turned into the main valley of the Charkhlik-su. The river was considerably swollen from the rain, and in a sharp bend, near the end of the gorge, we pitched our tent for the night under a solitary poplar. Here we had to wait a whole day for ten asses which I had hired to accompany us to the Kum-köll with maize for the horses. But nobody objected to the delay in such a beautiful locality, for we had plenty to do, and there was quite as much grazing as we wanted. But besides that, there was no need to hurry. We should any way reach the rendezvous before the slowly-moving camels.

The asses came up before nightfall, and next day we resumed our journey. It was a stiff march we had before us, up the deep-cut glen, in which the grey granite cliffs, in places undermined by the tumultuous flood, hung over like a vault or roof. We knew we had to cross the Charkhlik-su no less than sixteen times, and consequently would have to keep a sharp look-out. A shepherd whom we met gave us anything but encouraging news. His horse had fallen in the middle of the stream, and he had lost the whole of its load of bread, maize and clothes. The river, which had a volume of 318 cubic feet in the second,

was churned into foam as it thundered amongst the water-worn rocks. But, thanks to our care, we suffered no mishap. The Mussulmans, lightly clad, tried every ford before we ventured to cross, and the horses which carried the most valuable loads were led cautiously across one by one. At one of the fords, one of two mules which we had with us refused to follow the other animals, but thought she would go over a little at one side. But she lost her footing and was swept away by the stream, and flung upon a bank of gravel a good bit lower down. The Cossacks dashed in with their clothes on, and got her upon her feet again; but the whole of her load, which luckily consisted of flour and bread, was lost. Unfortunately we were now enveloped in a thick mist, and in the dim afternoon light the mountain peaks disappeared like the roof of a temple amid clouds of incense. Indeed, the spot where we encamped was known as Mesjid or Meschit-sai (the Mosque Valley).

On the 4th day we turned our backs upon the Charkhlik-su, and struck up a side-glen, narrower and wilder than even the preceding. So steep indeed did it become at last that we preferred to get off and walk; in some places we had literally to clamber up hand over hand. To get pack-horses up these steep places was a decidedly awkward business: their loads kept slipping off behind them, or turning round underneath them, and we were incessantly putting them to rights. There was seldom any track visible on the stony, gravelly surface—in point of fact, the route was very seldom used. On a projecting crag above our heads we once caught a glimpse of three *arkharis* or wild sheep; but they were too far off for the Cossacks to get a shot at them. At length we reached a deep notch in the next range, called Yaman-davan, or the Bad Pass; and a suitable name it was, for its summit was so sharp and difficult that there was only room for one horse to stand on it at a time. On both sides the pass was shut in by wild and lofty cliffs. On the east the descent was very much less steep, and the surface was covered with earth and overgrown with grass. The air was now clear again, and the view magnificent. Nor could we complain of the heat, for on the summit of the pass the thermometer registered only 2°.6 C. or 36°.7 Fahr.

Next day we continued up a new gorge, which at first was so narrow and difficult that in one place, where it was completely choked with granite débris, we were forced to unload the animals, and by our united efforts haul them one by one

The Last Sharp Turn in the Transverse Glen of the Charkhlik-su. Immediately Below the View Shown on p. 207.

up a rocky step or threshold, twelve or thirteen feet high. But, beyond that, the glen widened out again, and the going was easier. We observed no signs of animal life except partridges and "mountain swallows." Two or three of the horses and one of the mules were going stiff and lame in consequence of the hard and stony character of the path. That evening we encamped at a place called Tölkölik, where the thermometer registered only 5°.4 C. or 41°.7 Fahr., though during the night it fell to −6° C. or 21°.2 Fahr. Winter in the middle of summer! That year my summer lasted little more than six weeks in all.

On the 23rd of May a long and tiring march led us out upon open plateau-like uplands (*vidder*), a highland steppe in fact, carpeted in places by the yellow withered grass of the year before. We had crossed the last of the border-ranges, and were on the Tibetan tableland. The kulans now began to show themselves by ones and twos. And our arrival was greeted by heavy, dark clouds which at intervals shook out their contents over us in the form of rain and snow. Towards evening, when riding down a scarped ravine, we came, at a place called Hasheklik, across our old friend the Charkhlik-su. Here its volume was less, and its water of a peculiar milky-white colour, evidently caused by its springing out of or passing through some species of disintegrated white rock.

Shereb Lama, in his red robe, his yellow girdle, and his blue cap, which he protected in rainy weather by a Mongolian *bashlik* (hood), was the most picturesque member of our caravan. He was already on a footing of intimacy with both Shagdur and myself; but he made little acquaintance with the others, for as yet he could only speak a few words of Turki. But he was quick at learning, and soon began to pick it up. During these long marches he was very thoughtful, though what he thought about I do not know, unless it was about the strange company he had got into. It was an awful business to initiate his priestly reverence into the utility of astronomical observations and map-making. He evidently regarded me as a wonderful person, and he clung to me with unshaken confidence, even showing a degree of affection that was touching. He understood perfectly well that, though we were strangers, we should do him no harm. Every afternoon he gave me a lesson in Mongolian. I wrote down lists of words and phrases, and learnt them ready for the next day, and I have seldom had a pleasanter teacher. He was most anxious that I should make haste and learn his language

sufficiently to be able to discuss with him the subjects in which he was most interested.

We gave the horses a day's rest on the meadows of Hasheklik, but we had raw wintry weather, with snow and hail, so that it was impossible to work in the open air. I therefore called in the Lama for a talk, for, whatever might happen in the future, I did not wish him to think or believe that I had deceitfully led him on into any crazy-brained adventure. I wanted to give him an opportunity of returning, if he were so minded, to his own country before his reputation was compromised, and so I thought it best to tell him now, before we went further, that I intended accompanying him and Shagdur to Lassa, disguised as a Mongol. The news filled him with consternation, and he tried to convince me that it was utterly impossible. Nobody would dare to touch me and Shagdur; but he, being a lama, would be sure to lose his life. He was not afraid of the Dalai Lama, or of the Mongol or Chinese pilgrims in the city; but he was afraid of the Tibetans who watched the roads to it.

"If they do not kill me," he said, "they will destroy my career as a lama; I shall be looked upon as a renegade and traitor, who guided a European to Lassa."

Yet even now his resolution wavered, and he proposed that the whole caravan should march straight for the city. The worst that could happen to us would be that we should be firmly but politely turned back. He could then disguise himself as a Turk, and none of his friends in Lassa would have the least suspicion that he was with us. But when I stuck to my plan he proposed that I should call myself a Urankha—a people dwelling in the Altai Mountains, who are adherents of Lamaism, but speak a Turki dialect, resembling Jaggatai Turki, in which I was perfectly at home.

We spent the whole day discussing this matter, and by the time we had done, the Lama was greatly disturbed and upset. He agreed, however, to accompany us as far as the Kum-köll, whence, I promised him, if he were so minded, he might return home. Some of the ass-drivers, who would be no longer needed, were in any case to return from that lake, and he might go back with them to Charkhlik. He was, he said, afraid of the summer in the lowlands, and would prefer to go to Chimen. I at once saw through him: he meant to go and join the Mongol caravan and accompany them to Lassa, where in some unguarded moment he would be led to betray my plans.

Our Camp at Unkurluk, Looking up the Side-Glen.

That must be prevented at all costs. Whether we tried to get into Lassa or not, there was one very important service that he could render me. I needed an interpreter in Tibet. If my long tramp through unknown Tibet was not to lose half of its value, it was of the utmost importance that I should be able to converse with the people I met in the course of it. I explained all this to the Lama, and he at once saw that I was right. Finally, I proposed to him that he might remain behind with the caravan whilst I and the two Buriat Cossacks went to Lassa But this again did not suit him: he was not without his ambition, and he was no coward, as he proved on several subsequent occasions.

The following days he was silent and depressed, and rode by himself, thinking, no doubt, that he had drifted into queerer company than he had at first imagined. After this he was never quite friendly with Shagdur: he considered, and rightly too, that Shagdur ought to have acquainted him with my secret purpose before they left Kara-shahr. I explained to him that Shagdur had acted by my express order, and that, if he had let it be known that a European was thinking of going to Lassa in disguise, there was not a single lama from one end of Mongolia to the other that would have accepted his offer. Every day after this, both when we rode along the valleys and when we stopped in the twilight, we discussed our plans about Lassa. Shereb Lama underwent a veritable martyrdom of the spirit. I found great pleasure in his company: he was one of the best men I have ever associated with. For piety, resignation, and genuine goodness he would bear comparison with his colleague in *Kim*, one of the best characters Kipling has ever drawn. For the present, then, the arrangement stood thus: he was to accompany us to the Kum-köll, and there make his decision. He would then be like Hercules at the parting of the ways: on the one hand he could return to his quiet and peaceful cell in the monastery at Kara-shahr; on the other hand, he would have to make up his mind to face many remarkable, if not perilous, experiences.

During the next few days we crossed several of the contributories which flowed north-west to join the Charkhlik-su. Upon reaching the big cauldron-shaped valley or corrie of Unkurluk, which we did in a heavy snowstorm, we saw several herds of sheep scattered over the surrounding mountain slopes; but though the Cossacks scoured the neighbourhood, they failed to

find any traces of human beings. A little higher up we stopped at the entrance of a side-glen, where there was good grass, though no water; and as soon as the air cleared a little, we perceived two tents and ten or a dozen men. The Cossacks rode to the mountaineers to buy from them fuel and milk, and a dozen or so of sheep. They learned that there were eighteen shepherds settled there, in charge of sheep and horses from Cherchen, spending the winter in wretched earthen caves, partly covered with felt mats. The district abounded in game and other animals—arkharis, ibexes, yaks, bears, and wolves. But since the autumn before the shepherds had seen no yaks: those animals frequent higher altitudes in the summer. Partridges were calling to one another all over the mountain-sides; and the Cossacks went out and shot a few brace. That afternoon it snowed thick and fast, and we were again in the midst of winter.

It was cold and wintry weather when we left the Valley of the Earth-Caves on the 27th May. Here we dropped the guides from Charkhlik and five of the asses, whose loads of maize were consumed, and took in their stead three of the shepherds, and a dozen rather poor sheep, without fat tails. We were now at a considerable altitude (12,458 feet), as was evident from our difficulty in breathing, though as yet nobody showed symptoms of mountain-sickness.

The following day we crossed four easy secondary passes, and after traversing an undulating country covered with snow, reached the Valley of Kar-yaggdi, and a spring, from which gushed the brightest of sparkling waters. Snow-clad mountains shut in the view on the south and south-east. The glen ascended by an easy, pleasant gradient, and down its middle meandered the several arms of a brook, which issued from the fresh-fallen melting snow, and was tinged red by the finely disintegrated sandstone of the locality. Shortly afterwards we crossed over a pass, which, although quite easy and gentle, was yet one of great geographical importance, in that it formed the watershed between East Turkestan and the valley of Chimen. Its altitude was 13,383 feet, and the snow lay quite thick upon it.

We reached the broad valley of Chimen by an open glen, which ran towards the south-east, having the snowy ridge of Piazlik spread out in a glorious panorama before us. It was now colder and more wintry than it was in the previous October, and, summer though it was, all the mountains, except the top-

Buying Sheep from the Shepherds of Unkurluk.

most pinnacles, were wreathed in snow. We encamped on the left bank of a stream, which lower down joined the Togri-sai.

Here Shagdur suddenly became very ill; his pulse went up to 134, and his temperature to 38°.6 C. or 101°.5 Fahr. I may say that my own temperature, even at 13,000 feet and above, seldom exceeded 36°.0 C. or 96.°8 Fahr. Here we had to stop a day to nurse the sick man. Sirkin went out with his gun and brought back two orongo antelopes, so that we were able to give our sheep a few days' longer reprieve. At this season the antelopes were very lean, for the new grass had not yet sprung up. They were fatter and better in the autumn. On the 30th Shagdur was better, and positively insisted that we should go on. We crossed the broad stream of the Togri-sai, and penetrated the transverse glen which cut south-east through the mountain range of Piazlik. The weather was splendid, not a shimmer of cloud marred the pure turquoise blue of the sky, and the fresh-fallen snow for the most part melted and evaporated.

After advancing for a good bit up the glen, we missed the invalid and the Lama, and I sent back Li Loyeh to see what had become of them. When a little later they all three came up, Shagdur was faint and giddy, and scarcely able to sit in the saddle. I took some alcohol out of one of the flasks for zoological specimens, and made him a stiff glass of hot grog, and packed him in felts till he perspired. Towards evening he was decidedly better; his temperature dropped to 37°.2 C. or 98.°9 Fahr., and his pulse to 112. Except for this alcohol, I carried no spirits with me; and I will say, to the honour both of the Cossacks and the other men, none of them seemed to miss them. Spirits are an intolerable nuisance in a caravan; they slacken discipline and undermine the men's strength. Here, again, we rested a full day, to give the invalid an opportunity to get thoroughly well; and by the time we reached the lake of Kum-köll he was quite recovered.

It was the 1st of June when we struck the lake. We were travelling south-east across excellent ground, when in the distance we first caught sight of its immense, bright, ultramarine blue water. In the east the range of Kalta-alagan presented its vast dimensions to us in shortened perspective, its crest showing up dim and white. Every watercourse and ravine was dry; the lake had just then no active contributories. Hence it cost us a long search for water. At length one of the shepherds showed us a place where he thought we might obtain fresh water

by digging a well, and his surmise proved to be correct. The district abounded in kulans and orongo antelopes.

Here, according to agreement, we were to wait for the caravan. We waited the 2nd of June, we waited the 3rd of June; but no caravan turned up. The surface of the Kum-köll was ruffled with pretty big waves by a strong east wind, whose monotonous whining was the only sound that broke the silence of the wilderness. At times there was a mist; but even when it was clear we were unable to see the eastern shore of the lake. The wind was fresh and cool, like a sea breeze; in fact, when it brought with it squalls of hail or snow, it was a good deal too cool. The shepherds, who had now accomplished their task, were impatient to go home. After stowing beside the Cossacks' tent the three ass-loads of maize which were still left, they set off to return. I cannot imagine anything more tedious than month out, month in, to wander amongst those mountains, watching other people's sheep. And yet the shepherds were happy and contented enough; a very small thing delighted them down to the ground. For my own part, I found it a sufficient trial of patience to have to wait over two days for the caravan. I began to wonder if anything had gone wrong with it, although I knew it was in the trusty hands of Chernoff, Cherdon, and Turdu Bai.

Meanwhile Shagdur was treated with massage and cold bandages, and gradually recovered. Sirkin rode to our camp of the year before, on the north-west side of the lake, to measure a line for controlling my itineraries. And there he left a sign-post—a piece of wood with a hand drawn on it, pointing towards our camp in the west—in case the caravan should strike the lake on that side.

The 4th of June was a beautiful day, the atmosphere being perfectly clear, so that we were able to follow the Kalta-alagan right away to its outermost extremities. Its crest appeared to vanish to a needle point. The lake presented a fresh play of colour—light green, striped with white foam. The horses were grazing some distance from the camp, and most of the men were asleep; but our Lama maintained an incessant look-out for the caravan. He was greatly interested in my telescope, and very fond of using it. I was working in my yurt, when he came and said he thought he could see them coming. I took the telescope, and sure enough there they were at the foot of the mountains—a long black line, followed by several small dots.

Nothing more was done that day; we were all too much interested in watching the progress of the caravan.

The distance was still too great for them to be able to see our tents; but instead of steering directly towards our camp, they were travelling due east. Then, to our great surprise, they stopped, unloaded, and turned the camels loose to graze. I sent Mollah Shah to them. At length we saw a horseman ride out and meet him, and both continued to their camp. Then the camels were again driven together, and the caravan once more got under way, the long line curling round like a railway train circling round the end of a valley. Then from behind a detached

The Camel-Loads Stacked Beside the Kum-köll.

group of hills in the east there emerged a solitary rider, approaching at a good hand-gallop. It was Kutchuk. Chernoff, the caravan leader, had sent him off two days before in advance, to report their approach. Kutchuk had seen Sirkin's sign-post on the north side of the lake, and had at once understood its meaning. He rode my old Kashgar horse, and brought nothing but good news.

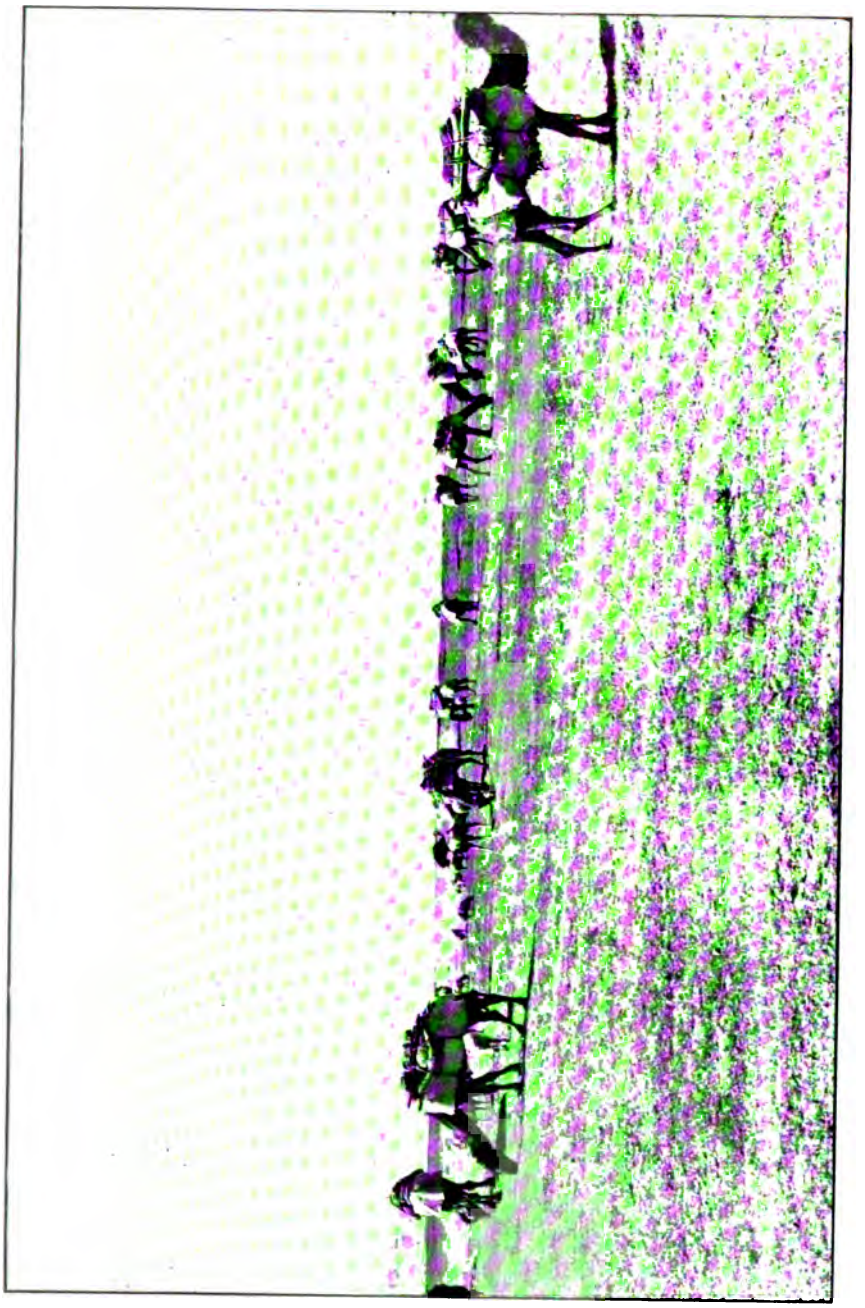
Meanwhile the caravan was approaching in good order. The two Cossacks galloped up and, saluting in military fashion, reported that all was well. Men and animals were alike in first-rate condition. One mule, however, had been left behind at Baghtokai, as unfit for work. I gave her to some of the men who

were returning, to see if they could make anything of her. Next came the ass caravan, with Dovlet Caravan-bashi at its head; and in the rear of this motley company appeared a kulan, galloping amid a cloud of dust straight towards our camp. But when he perceived he was running into danger, he turned tail and went off towards the west.

Next arrived Turdu Bai, leading his camels; they were fat and in excellent condition, and full of play, evidently well content with the cool mountain air. And no wonder they rejoiced at being freed from the oppressive heat and murderous insects of the lowlands. During their rest-days on the march the men had made *chapans*, or "white felt rugs," to protect them against the extreme changes of temperature. The three little ones with their white coats were a pretty sight as they trotted at their mothers' heels—in fact, the youngest of them skipped and jumped about without showing the least signs of fatigue. He was only a few days old when he got up into the rarefied mountain air, so that his lungs became adapted to it in good time; it was to this circumstance, I feel sure, that he showed a greater power of endurance than the other two, and long survived them both. Even the stag, which generally accompanied the camels, had put on flesh. He had only one fault; he would eat too much maize, and refuse to touch the yellow mountain grass.

Last in the procession came the horses, with their loads and drivers. Each detachment defiled in front of me and the Cossacks, who were standing beside me, and as they marched past the men saluted politely. It took some time for the full cavalcade to pass in review. Then they pitched their tents and stacked their baggage immediately south of our camp, arranging the loads so as to make an enclosure or fold for the sheep. Of these we had quite a flock; on the march they obediently followed Vanka, a ram from Kuchar. This animal had been with us ever since the autumn of 1899, and was the only one out of all the animals of the caravan which was still with us when, a year later, we returned to Kashgar.

When the camp was all ready, the shore of the lake resembled a lively *corso*, with groups of men chatting round the fires, the animals scattered all over the niggardly steppe, trying to pick up what they could. Meanwhile the water beat—beat against the shore, for the lake was again churned up by a regular easterly gale, and down came the rain thick and fast until our settlement was drenched.



The Camels on the Shore of the Lake of Kum-köll.

A whole day was spent in making arrangements for a fresh start. For the first thing, I re-packed my own travelling cases, so that I might have ready to hand in the two which always stood inside my yurt such instruments and other things as I should want every day. The meteorological observatory, which Sirkin took charge of, was kept in a special box, under his own eye. Then the preserved foods which would be required in the immediate future were also packed up separately.

The time was now come for our Lama to make his final decision as to whether he would accompany me or return, and his decision was already made—with the help of Li Loyeh. The latter, who had performed his duties irreproachably for close upon a year, now wished to leave me, alleging that he had learned his old father had died in Keriya, and he must go home to look after his own interests. But I did not take him seriously, for twice before, when we were in the middle of the desert, he had dished up the same story. Had he not been paid half a year's wages in advance at Charkhlik, it would not have mattered much. In fact, it was strange he had not simply run away, for he rode his own horse, and it was one of the very best in the caravan. Now our Lama had made up his mind to go with Li Loyeh, his intention being to find out the Mongol caravan in the Chimen valley or Tsaidam. But, when he learned that Master Li Loyeh was not to be allowed to return, even though we had to keep guard upon him, he changed his mind, came to me in my yurt and declared that, let happen what would, he would follow me to the end of the world. The only condition he made was, that in case he fell ill, I would not desert him ; but I soon convinced him that he had nothing to fear on that score, for we never deserted even our animals until their case was absolutely hopeless. This matter therefore was soon settled. Without the Lama we could scarcely have made our way through the inhabited parts of Tibet ; and Li Loyeh, whose real name was Tokta Ahun, although a little bit "dotty," was a general favourite. He told funny stories and related comical anecdotes, and did his work splendidly all the way to Ladak.

Finally, I called together all the Mussulmans, and formally nominated Turdu Bai *tugachi-bashi*, or "leader of the camels," while Hamra Kul, a big, strong man from Charkhlik, who had his son, Turdu Ahun, a lad of 16, with him, was appointed *att-bashi*, or "leader of the horses." The other men were straightly enjoined that in everything which concerned the animals they

were to render implicit obedience to these two. Mollah Shah, on the other hand, was not promoted, because, on the way up to the Kum-köll, when set to guard the horses, he did not know when they all ran away. By evening, it is true, he managed to recover them all except five, which did not turn up till the following morning. The Cossacks ranked, of course, above the Mussulmans, and each had his own special duties to perform, besides looking generally after all the rest.

CHAPTER XIII.

FROM THE KUM-KÖLL TO THE ARKA-TAGH.

THE next day was the first, since I began my tramp through Central Asia, that I had the whole of my caravan collected together in one place. We were now to march in a solid body south through Tibet. The work of striking camp and loading up proceeded pretty smartly, for each man had his own appointed duty to do. Whilst some of them took down the tents, and re-packed the boxes which we used every time we stopped, others lifted the loads upon the camels and horses, and as each section got ready it started off by itself.

First went the camels in five different groups, each with its leader, Turdu Bai himself riding at the head. Amongst the animals, as amongst the men, some possessed special features of interest, *e.g.*, the three young camels which trotted at their mothers' heels. The youngest, although only a little more than a month old, easily did his 23½ miles without being distressed. Amongst the bigger camels, the tall, handsome *bughra* (male), which helped me through the desert of Keriya in 1896, and which we had bought again recently in Charkhlik, was especially noticeable. Nahr, the dromedary, which had crossed the Gobi with us to Lôu-lan, always wore a muzzle, to prevent him from biting the others. The two *artans* (castrated males) which had taken part in all three desert journeys, and one of which I had ridden, being the quietest, carried my instrument cases. My old riding-camel was one of the nine which survived to Ladak.

The horses and mules, to the number of 45, were also led or driven in separate groups, each accompanied by men on foot, to see that the loads rode level, and did not fall off. The sheep followed Vanka, and scarcely required looking after. We had eight dogs, which ran and frisked about the animals, as if the whole were a huge joke. As for the stag, the very first day he

turned unwell and was unable to keep up, nor could he eat his maize. When I saw that he had not strength to travel with us, I gave orders for him to be killed, although it was with an aching heart I did so; but I preserved his skeleton.

The asses were always the last to be ready, and we soon left them behind; in fact, they did not reach camp at all that day. Although they numbered now about 60, only two or three of them lived to the end of the journey.

This long caravan of animals, laden with boxes, cases, tents, yurts, bundles, and sacks, made a picturesque, and even imposing spectacle, as, with slow, heavy tread, they wound through the desolate landscape beside the blue-green lake. Cossacks, Russians, and Buriats, in their threadbare uniforms, and their felts strapped behind them on the saddle—Mohammedans in their chapans and skin caps—ass-drivers, more like a band of banditti and tatterdemalions than anything else—the Lama, in his red robe, turning up, now here, now there, in different parts of the caravan, like a good-natured Puck—all these contributed to make up a varied and lively picture. It put me in mind of an army marching to conquer a new country. And, in truth, that is precisely what we were; but it was to be a peaceful conquest, namely, to subdue unknown countries to human knowledge. All the men, as well as all the animals, were now in splendid trim; but how long would they remain so? Experience had taught me that it was only a question of time before they would begin to melt away. I knew perfectly well that the journey would not be accomplished without victims. I had 30 men, but several of them were to return when we reached the Arka-tagh, including all who attended upon the ass-caravan.

My place was sometimes in the van, sometimes in the rear of the procession; but my own special work, of which plotting the route was the most important, generally took up the greater part of my time.

At first we travelled south, close beside the lake, but were soon turned south-east by the treacherous marshes and morasses, and then followed the foot of a ridge, having on our left a large lagoon, with intensely salt water. We reached the other side of the ridge over a little pass, which consisted of soft, loose earth, that made it difficult and tiring for the heavily-laden camels. On the other side we were led straight down into a brook, which trickled along a veritable ravine. The bottom was nothing but brick-red mud, in which we should have been smothered, had

we not kept to the middle of the brook. Even though the stream was flowing, it was nevertheless in places intensely salt. The camels kept slipping and falling to their knees. With the view of escaping out of this wretched hole, we struck up the first side-ravine we came to, surmounted another pass, crossed another valley, and climbed up to a third pass. This last was hemmed in by steep banks of soft, reddish-brown earth, sculptured into fantastic towers and bastions, so that it was like riding through the ruins of an ancient town.

At sunset we encamped (No. XII.) in the dreariest region it is possible to conceive. We had not indeed expected to find either pasture or fuel; but we did expect to find water. Fortunately about 9 o'clock it began to snow quite briskly. We at once put out all the cups and dishes we had, and in that way gathered sufficient to make a few mouthfuls of tea for each man. The animals were allowed to have as much maize as they could eat; for it was clear that the asses would not be able to go very far, and it was better to use up their loads in this way than to leave them behind or throw them away.

As soon as it stopped snowing we set to work, although it was then late, and dug a well; but, after getting down 3¼ feet, we gave it up as a bad job. Next morning, however, there was a pretty large pool, big enough to supply all the men, and all the dogs as well. Dovlet came up with half of his ass-caravan. That day we did a short journey, so as to give the rest of it a chance to catch us up.

Chernoff had already reconnoitred the country ahead, and now led us south-west, across hard, firm ground, with scanty clumps of yappkak, networked in every direction by kulan tracks. We could still make out the range of the Kalta-alagan to the north; but the lake which lay on this side of it was hidden by the hills we crossed the day before. By this we were quite familiar with the characteristic Tibetan weather—violent hail-storms, followed immediately by sunshine, or a bright sky above head, with black, gravid clouds ringing round the horizon.

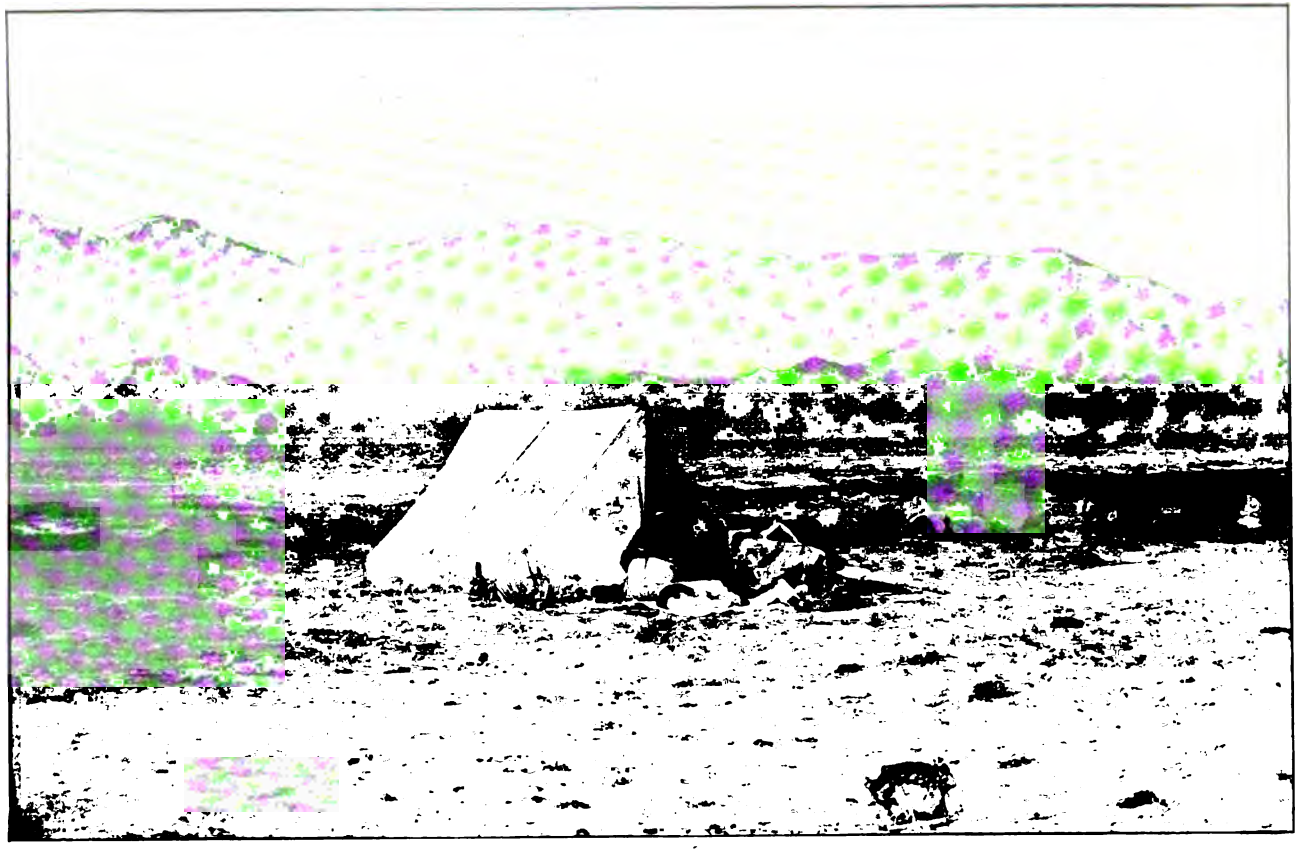
The same order which governed the march prevailed also when we stopped for the night. Every evening the camp was arranged on the same plan, so far as the varying contours of the ground would admit of it. At one end of the long row of loads stood Turdu Bai's tent, which he shared with Hamra Kul, Mollah Shah, and Rosi Mollah. The last-named, the Mohammedan priest of the caravan, was a pleasant, trustworthy man

from Charkhlik, about 40 years of age, who was able to write. Like Li Loyeh, he rode his own horse, and was paid the same wages as most of the Mussulmans, namely, 8 sär (about 30s.) a month.

The tent at the other end of the baggage was occupied by Kutchuk, who used it as a kitchen for myself and the Cossacks. Cherdon was my own steward, with Kutchuk for his assistant. Chernoff cooked for the Cossacks. In this way our kitchen was separated from that of the Mussulmans, who object to eat with "unbelievers," and have a mortal horror of any cooking-pot into which, by any chance, a piece of bacon might happen to find its way. On the other hand, the Cossacks had just as decided an objection to pollute their cooking-pot with the flesh of the wild-ass, for which the Mussulmans have a special fondness.

The next in the arrangement was the big yurt, occupied by Sirkin, Shagdur, and the Lama. Each man had his own bed, consisting of felts and skins, besides a pillow, and kept his private effects in a box. The natives' personal belongings were not very bulky: in most cases a *kurchin*, or "double knapsack" of leather, was sufficient to contain them all.

Although I issued strict orders to Shagdur to abstain from hard work after his illness, before many days he was hard at it again, lifting boxes and sacks with the best of them. As for our Lama, I had given him to understand that, being a "Doctor of Divinity," he need not perform any of the harder work incidental to caravan life, for that belonged to the Mussulmans. His sole duties would be, I told him, to give me lessons in Mongolian, and afterwards, when we got into Tibet proper, to act as my interpreter of Tibetan, or Tangut-kälä, as it is called in Mongolian. These instructions I repeated several times, but it was all to no avail; there was no work which the Lama thought too rough for him, although his soft hands were far more accustomed to handling the holy volumes. He would rush in and lug off the heaviest boxes, or hoist them up as ably as any man in the caravan. Old Turdu Bai just laughed, and chuckled to himself at getting such a useful hand. By this means our Lama earned a certain degree of popularity in the caravan, and piqued the Mussulmans' ambition. A believer could not, of course, allow himself to be beaten by a *Kaper*, or "heathen," who ate swine's flesh. The Lama was a keen observer, and had a wide knowledge of men. Before very long he had taken the measure of every man in the caravan, and grouped the Moham-



Turdu Bai's Tent.

medans in a double series, one according to their value as workers, the other according to their intrinsic worth as men.

The next tent was Chernoff and Cherdon's little yurt. Chernoff's business was to superintend the actual labour of the caravan; he was held responsible for everybody doing his duty. Cherdon was, as I have said, my body-servant and cook.

At the extreme end of the opposite wing stood my yurt, guarded by Yolldash and Yollbars, whose zeal was often too lively with regard to imaginary enemies—that is to say, our own horses and camels, when they happened to be peacefully roaming about the neighbourhood. For sometimes, when the latter failed to find anything to eat, they would go up to Turdu Bai's tent and beg for maize.

The rest of the men had to content themselves with tents of a more temporary character, such as felt carpets stretched between the camels' loads. They cooked their meals over fires lighted in the streets and market-place of our tented town. Some of them were on duty every night, keeping watch upon the animals, to prevent them from straying too far. In this irksome duty they of course took turns, while Chernoff saw that nobody shirked his turn, sometimes even riding out in the middle of the night to where the animals were grazing, to convince himself that the guards were not asleep. As for the sheep, they were always folded at night, because of the wolves.

Every evening, as soon as the tents were pitched, the camp presented a busy scene of life and movement. The men talked and argued in Jaggatai Turki, Russian, and Mongolian, for about an hour. Then Turdu Bai led off the camels, and Hamra Kul the horses, to pasture, and issued their orders to their subordinates. After that any pack-saddles which had burst open were mended; while the camels or horses which were not up to the mark were kept in camp, and specially looked after. Our fuel consisted now almost entirely of *argol*, or the dung of wild yaks and kulans; although we had a valuable reserve in the strong wooden frames to which the baggage was lashed. As the loads grew gradually less, these saddle-frames became no longer necessary, but were gradually used up, though at first only for starting the other fires. Whilst supper was cooking, the men gathered in groups round the fires, talking or resting. When, as was the case to-day, the usual westerly storm burst over the camp, with a heavy fall of snow, making the country white and wintry in the course of a few minutes, the men simply

flung felt carpets over their shoulders, and without further concern, continued the preparations for their supper.

The felts and skins, which made my bed, were placed, like those of the men, immediately upon the ground. As soon as my yurt was up, and my bed ready, I sat down and wrote up my diary for the day. After supper or dinner, call it which you like, I plotted out my map, reckoned the compass-bearings and distances, and marked the situation of the new camp on a general or key map. Thus, I always knew exactly where we were, and could avoid approaching too near to the routes of Mr. Littledale and M. Dutreuil de Rhins on the west, or that of Prince Henri d'Orléans and M. Bonvalot on the east, and at the same time was able to direct our course towards Lassa.

The ass caravan camped separately, close beside ours. As yet only 30 asses had turned up, and we knew nothing of the rest. Next morning, the 8th of June, I sent back the old man Dovlet to see what was become of them.

Meanwhile we continued our journey up a dry ravine, carved through soft disintegrated clay and sand of a red colour. The sky was everywhere clouded, grass was scanty, hares the only animals. After a while the country became difficult. Hundreds of dry watercourses gathered into a glen that pointed towards the north, and was pretty deeply trenched through the hills. We descended into it, and followed the bed of the brook; but it was so soft and loose that the camels splashed the mud about them at every step, and soon began to sink in. Shouts of warning—shouts of encouragement arise every moment. A camel has capsized—a horse has flung off its load—a mule is stuck fast in the mire! The most malevolent imagination could not invent a more irksome and tiresome surface to travel over. Sometimes these deep, but intermittent runnels were no bigger than mere gutters a foot wide. Thousands of them ran together at steep angles to form bigger rivulets, and these again gathered into others still bigger, until, finally, they issued into the main valley which ran down to the Kum-köll. Hence to march along the bottom of the main valley was like walking with leaden soles or heavy weights attached to our boots; for, of course, on ground like that everybody went on foot. In one pool that I stepped into, I left my boot, and dumped into the mud up to the knee. The paths which led to Dante's hell could scarcely be worse than this seven-fold, accursed highway. And the worst of it was, it was taxing the animals' strength to no pur-

pose ; in fact, two camels soon became exhausted, and had to be released from their loads. Yet in the distance these heights had looked so easy and innocent that the men had asserted we should have almost level ground to travel over.

At last things grew so bad that we were brought literally to a standstill. Out of this horrible quagmire we must get somehow, and that soon. Turdu Bai proposed to climb up the bank on the left, and summoned a dozen men with their spades and set them to work to prepare a sloping pathway up. Whilst they were doing this, Chernoff rode on to reconnoitre, but soon came back, and said that it was impossible for a man even on foot to advance further in that direction. I at once gave the order right-about-face, and immediately the long procession turned about, each animal on the ground where it stood. This, however, was no easy thing to do, owing to the narrowness of the space. But if going up the ravine was bad, going down it was ten times worse, for the ground was now trampled into mire. After numberless small mishaps, we eventually managed to struggle back out of this treacherous trap. Next we tried another glen, which led up to another pass on the west, and which Sirkin had already examined. The middle of the glen was occupied by a dry watercourse with vertical sides. This we had to cross two or three times, and as the sides consisted of red soil, as loose and soft as flour, it cost us a good deal of spade labour to get up and down. Upon reaching the top of the little pass, I sat and watched the caravan file past me, down into the more open country on the other side. Of the two camels which had given up, we were only able to get one over, and that not without five men bodily pushing him up. He, I saw, would be the next to give in.

Upon reaching a little meadow beside a fresh spring we halted, and for four reasons. In the first place, the pasture was exceptionally good, better than beside the Kum-köll. In the second place, the animals were exhausted. In the third place, we still had to wait for the asses, which were now a long way behind, and were going very badly ; several of them had, in fact, perished during the last two days. And, lastly, it was necessary to send scouts to look for a practicable road south, for it was a sheer waste of time to take on the whole of the caravan until we had ascertained what the country was like ahead. Mollah Shah and Li Loyeh were the men chosen for

scouting duty, and they were instructed not to return until they had found a decent road.

At three o'clock we had a storm from the west, accompanied by snow, and at nine o'clock a storm from the east. I sat and worked in my furs, half leaning over a brazier, and this was in the—middle of summer, 16° south of London ; but then we were at an altitude of over 13,000 feet above the level of the sea. I felt sorry for the poor camels, being brought into such a cold climate just when they had shed their coats, though we protected them as well as we could with thick felt rugs. All the next day it snowed fast, except that at noon it cleared sufficiently to let me take an observation for latitude. In the afternoon the scouts returned and said they had found a practicable road. Upon this I decided to start at once ; we could wait at the next camp for the asses to catch us up, as well as send out fresh scouts to prepare for the following day's march. It is by no means such an easy thing to travel through Tibet as some people would have us believe ; it requires a very great deal of forethought and study. During the night the temperature fell to −13°.0 C., or 18°.6 Fahr., and during the day seldom rose above freezing-point.

Our scouts now led us due south, and although it was good travelling, we soon had to leave behind two of our camels, one of them being the individual which had such a rooted objection to passes. At length we approached the left bank of a considerable stream, the biggest we had seen for some time ; it was full of water, and there were large, thin sheets of ice floating on its surface. We stopped on a hill slope about 100 yards from its margin, at a spot where the first blades of grass were just shooting up. I walked towards the stream, and found myself on the edge of a precipice of loose, vertical gravel-and-shingle, about 76 feet high. Places like that were dangerous for the camels, their heavy weight causing the ground to give way under them. During the course of the evening Dovlet arrived with his 30 asses.

As this was a suitable camping-ground, we remained three days, but led the camels to a safer valley to graze. Six more asses arrived with their burdens intact ; but as we heard nothing of the rest, I sent Cherdon back with some of the mules and horses to help them up. It was three days before he returned, but he brought with him all their loads. One day nine of them had perished, and thirteen on another day, so that only two or

three now survived, and they were no longer fit for use. Of the two camels that we left behind Turdu Bai succeeded in bringing in one, the other I entrusted to the care of the ass-drivers, who were returning, desiring them, if possible, to get the animal down to a warmer climate.

The Cossacks spent their time hunting, and shot several orongo antelopes and wild-geese; the latter were resting on their journey north. In the evening Sirkin used to read aloud to his comrades Przhevalsky's *Fourth Journey*, in which they were greatly interested.

Sirkin and Mollah Shah were appointed guides, and went off

View at Camp no. XVI.

with provisions and heavy coats, in case they should not be back before night. This was the 14th June. We had a favourable start, up a broad, open valley, with a gentle ascent, although in places it was dangerous in the lowest parts. Once Chernoff nearly disappeared, horse and all. Wild-geese swarmed everywhere; the men asserted that they were a peculiar species, and were not found north of the upper lake of Kum-köll. One which the Cossacks shot at and wounded, fluttered down into the bottom of the valley. With marvellous agility Ördek scrambled down the steep bank and ran after it; but he forgot where he was, and nearly fainted for want of breath and the violent beating of his heart. After killing the goose he lay flat

on his back for a long time motionless. I sent two of the other men to help him, and at the end of an hour he was all right again. Shagdur shot three partridges, and a little bit further on Sirkin shot another orongo antelope. Kulans also abounded, the troops generally numbering about a score. But we saw no wild yaks, although their droppings were abundant.

On and on plodded the caravan to the dull jangle of the big bells. We were directing our steps towards a glen which penetrated the formidable mountain-range that lay across our road. At the entrance of the glen the grass was thick, though short, and the glen was nearly filled with a big sheet of ice. It was just the place for a camp, much too good to be passed by. But hardly was the tent up, when an unexpected incident happened. We had stooped on the very edge of the ice sheet, and on the far side of it the men soon perceived a black object, which they took to be a stone. But it moved. Then they thought it was a young yak deserted by its mother. I heard the Cossacks whispering earnestly together. Presently Chernoff stole towards me with the telescope, and whispered in a state of great excitement, "There's a bear! It's making straight for the camp!" And, sure enough, Bruin, taking not the slightest notice of either the tents or the camels, was marching calmly towards us as though he belonged to us. The dogs were hastily coupled together and led away out of sight, so as not to spoil sport. The Cossacks ran for their horses, for they thought that the bear would soon get scent of us and run away. But I advised them to stay where they were and wait quietly; it was so enjoyable watching the animal's movements through the telescope. Nearer and nearer came the shaggy recluse. He must have been both deaf and blind. He was now actually on the ice, barely 200 paces away. He advanced diagonally across it, making straight for the camp. He moved extremely slowly; evidently he was tired. Every now and again he stopped and sniffed the ground, though all the time he kept his head down. Then he dipped down into a hollow of the ice, and stayed there some time to drink. I advised the hunters to creep close up to the edge of the ice, and there wait for him.

Bruin came on again, marching straight to his doom. The three shots rang out as though they were one. Bruin did not stop, but went off at a gallop up the slope past the camp. The horses were standing ready. In a moment the hunters were in the saddle and after him. Another volley and down

tumbled the brute, rolling like a ball to the bottom of the steep declivity. Picking up my big camera, I went to the spot where he lay and took two or three photos of the hermit of the mountains—the Tibetan bear. Then the men flayed him, for I wanted to keep his skin and skeleton. He was well riddled by the bullets. His teeth showed that he was an ancient male, for they were full of gaping, big holes. He must have suffered horribly from toothache, but it was now radically cured. In his stomach we found a marmot, which he had just devoured, and several herbs. The former he had swallowed whole, skin and all, although he had been unable to crush its bones. But he had exercised great ingenuity in making his meal as palatable as possible; for he had skinned the marmot down to its toe ends, rolled the skin up into a ball with the hair inside, and gulped it down whole.

The next day Sirkin and Mollah Shah returned, and undertook to guide us for two days. We had intended to start on the 16th June; but when the men called me in the morning, they told me a violent snowstorm was raging. It had snowed all night, and the snow lay several inches thick on the ground. In face of this, we decided to wait a bit, and we did. It snowed all day, and kept us there all the next night. But on the following day the weather atoned for its own bad behaviour; the sky was pure and bright, and the snow soon disappeared. With Sirkin as our guide, we ascended a very broad, waterless valley, leading up to the Arka-tagh. Except for green sappy moss, the pasture came to an end, and when we at length struck a little spring, we thought it best to halt. Again it snowed, coming on in the afternoon with a north-north-west wind, and the yurts were soon white.

The following day Sirkin again led the way up to a flat, easy pass, and at the end of an hour or so we reached the summit of the range, which for some days past had blocked our road. Then to the south-west there again rose before us another mountain-range, mantled from summit to foot in snow: that could be no other than our old enemy the Arka-tagh. Between the two ranges, but nearer to us, was a basin of self-contained drainage, with a little freshwater lake at the bottom, which was completely icebound. As there was grass beside it, we decided that that should be the place for a stop. Early next morning three men went off to reconnoitre again, with instructions that they were all to return if they discovered grass within about six

miles; but if they found none, then one of them was to come back and tell us, whilst the other two went on. At noon, one of the three returned, but it was two days before we saw the others again. They reported that they had discovered a pass, though not a very easy one. From this camp (No. XVIII.), which was 15,529 feet above sea-level, I sent back several of my company. The few asses that survived were in such a pitiable condition that it would have been cruel to take them over the Arka-tagh. I therefore gave Dovlet Caravan-bashi permission to return. At best he would only be able to save half-a-dozen of his animals. I packed up the skeleton and skin of the bear and the stag, and entrusted them to the old man to send on to Kashgar when he got home, for he had horses with him as well as asses. At the same time I sent back three of the men I had engaged at Charkhlik—namely, Niaz, Kader, and Kurban. None of them wanted to go, but we had three men too many, and these were the least useful.

Thus reduced in strength, we resumed our march on the 21st June towards the south-south-west, the ground being in every respect favourable—a gentle ascent, just hard enough to bear the animals, and overgrown with scanty grass. When I speak of grass, I do not wish to suggest an exaggerated idea of the reality. Generally speaking, the region was perfectly barren, except for a few small patches of hard, sharp yellow blades, one or two inches high; this was called grass. I would not advise anybody who was wearing thin summer clothing to fling himself down on "grass" of that description for a siesta; for it was as hard as whalebone, and pierced like a needle through even thick clothes. Yet in that inhospitable country this was the only fodder obtainable.

Shagdur and Sirkin shot two antelopes. When the latter was riding to pick up his game, his horse stumbled head over heels with him, flinging his rider, who rolled for some distance. The horse lay stone dead; either he had broken his neck, or had a stroke. Strange to say, Sirkin, who came limping back, was little the worse for the mishap. He was very sorry to lose his favourite; it was a beautiful and powerful animal, with a long mane, and reminded me of the war-horses of Charles XII.'s time.

Once more our friend the pass-hater failed to come in, and Turdu Bai, who remained behind with him, turned up at night alone. Next morning I sent two men back, with orders to kill

him if he refused to follow. But when we got over the Arka-tagh I learned that they had not killed the beast, their hearts having failed them. The camel was strong and well, and they left him to find his way back by the way he had come.

At Camp no. XIX. my old riding-camel, Chong-artan, was seized with some peculiar affection. His hind legs were as if paralysed, and he was unable to move them, except as the men lifted them each in turn. I was always sorry to lose my veterans, and had them looked after with extra care. But even thus early there were no less than nine camels that showed signs of exhaustion. Every evening we gave them a big dose of flour —in fact, we used up that important commodity at such a rate that our supply, which was originally calculated for ten months, was reduced to scarce sufficient for six. On the other hand, the diminution in the number of carriers—the tired camels—made the burdens of the survivors all the heavier, and rather than leave anything behind, we thought it best to use it up a little recklessly. The lame camel was massaged, and released from duty whilst crossing the Arka-tagh; and he recovered in an amazing way, and was, as I have said, one of the nine survivors which marched into Ladak. His place was always in the van, and he carried a big bell.

The day we reached Camp no. XIX. we did twenty miles; but it was a long time before we ever accomplished as much again.

CHAPTER XIV.

ACROSS THE ARKA-TAGH IN A SNOWSTORM.

On the 22nd of June I was called at daybreak. The morning was cold and raw, and the yurt but badly warmed, and I made haste to get into my clothes. The caravan, too, was promptly ready, and off we started, keeping as close together as possible, to storm the Arka-tagh. But we had barely got a stone's-throw from camp when one of the camels gave up. We took off his load; he got up, and went on a bit; then he fell headlong on a slope. He was evidently done for, and a slash with a knife put an end to his sufferings.

The sky at starting had not been very promising, and when we were half way up the valley the storm burst—one of the very worst I have ever experienced in Tibet. It was brought by the north-west wind, and shook out tons upon tons of snow and hail over men, camels, horses, mountains—everything. The snow melted on our clothes till we were wet through and stiff with cold. It was in vain we sought shelter against the cutting blast. Although the ascent was nothing worth speaking of, it was nevertheless killing work at that altitude, and in such weather. First one camel and then another stopped exhausted, and refused to advance further. One after one we uncoupled them and left them behind, each in charge of a man.

So blinding was the snow that it was utterly impossible to see where we were going to. At noon it was twilight, and at twilight it was pitch dark. And the snow tumbled down incessantly, until everything was dazzling white, except the stream, which tinkled with a sharp metallic sound as it rippled like a dark winding ribbon down the middle of the valley. I sat leaning forward in my saddle, trying to protect my map as well as I could. Where we were going to I did not know. I simply followed blindly the nearest caravan-bell. Slowly, like snails,

like tortoises, we crawled up that wretched pass, the ascent gradually growing steeper as we advanced. Time after time the air was rent with the hoarse scream of the camels. Time after time came the warning shout, "*Tuga kalldi*," *i.e.*, "A camel has stopped!" Then one of the men would take compassion upon the poor beast and draw him aside, and let the others pass, and afterwards follow slowly on in their wake.

The snow grew deeper and deeper. Taking the Lama with me, I pushed on to see if the pass was practicable. In itself it presented no difficulty; but the altitude! the snow! There we sat waiting, waiting, wrapped in our cloaks, seeking what shelter we could behind the horses. The sharp, keen snow crystals cut our faces. We shook and dithered with cold, and gasped for breath. We were 17,025 feet above the level of the sea! Through the howling of the tempest—and it was fiercer than ever up here upon the top—we heard the shouts of the men and the mournful jingle of the bells; but it was a terribly long time before the first emerged like spectres from amongst the "pillars" of driving snow.

Thank God! I thought to myself when I counted the thirtieth camel go past. That was all except four. Two of them had given up at the foot of the last descent, and the other two almost on the very summit of the pass. Amongst them were the oldest of the three young ones and its mother. The horses stood the strain capitally, and the mules were very little the worse. The sheep, too, came through the ordeal splendidly.

On its southern face, the Arka-tagh offered a long, gentle slope, a sort of wide, open rotunda, surrounded on all sides by relatively low mountains. But under foot it was abominable: the fresh-fallen snow was converted into slush, which splashed and "sucked" at every step. We had to make long detours round the worst places. Camping on such ground was, of course, not to be thought of. We should have lost all our camels and packages in the mire. We were now possessed by only one desire, and that was for a dry, firm spot on which to pitch our tents. Grazing—fuel—these were luxuries we did not dream of asking for. At last we reached a gravel slope with moisture trickling through it; and there we pitched our tents.

Turdu Bai and several of the men did not turn up till ten o'clock that night. They had been obliged to leave the four camels behind them, but at daybreak on the 23rd of June they returned, taking horses with them to bring in the camels' loads

and the hay in their pack-saddles, if they could not save the animals themselves. But their hopes were deceived. The camels were too far gone, and had to be killed, though we never took the final step until we were perfectly sure the case was hopeless. Thus in one day we lost no less than five camels, the biggest loss I ever had on any of my journeys, even counting that across the Takla-makan in 1896. The main body of the caravan having been thus reduced one-sixth, the loads were too heavy for the survivors. Accordingly I gave orders that both horses and camels should have as much flour and maize as they could eat. Next day we only travelled seven miles.

The principal thing now was to find a suitable camping-ground, so that the animals might rest after their strenuous exertions. This we eventually found on the farther side of a little brook, where a few miserable blades of grass were sprouting. It was as much as ever one of the other exhausted camels could do to reach the spot. A horse, which looked perfectly fresh and well, dropped dead all of a sudden right amongst the tents. This was, however, but a beginning. Every day we lost at least one of our animals. This part of our route could easily have been traced by the dead animals we left behind us. A lugubrious road, when skeletons stand for the milestones! I have frequently observed that a camel will begin to shed tears when it feels death imminent and the blood stiffening in its veins.

The weather now took a turn for the better; the sun was quite warm, and soon dried us after our soaking on the Arka-tagh. This diminished very appreciably the weight of our loads. On the morning of Midsummer Day, although the sky was clear, the country looked decidedly wintry. As soon as I had had my breakfast I went and thoroughly inspected the caravan animals, During the day Hamra Kul, the leader of the horse caravan, was reported to me as being seriously ill; and the man did indeed look wretched. He complained of pains all over his body; but I gave him quinine, and let him ride, for all the Mussulmans had been constrained to walk the day before, after the camels' loads were transferred to their horses.

The next on the list was my favourite riding-horse. He was scarcely able to stand. Our Lama, who in addition to his priestly dignity, was a medico by profession, and lugged about with him a whole chestful of more or less efficient drugs from Lassa, took him in hand, and promised that he would cure him. He opened the arteries in both fore-legs, so that the black blood

gushed out by the cupful. Then he bound up the wound, and the horse tottered after us into camp. Several camels were out of sorts; all were tired, and two or three carried no loads.

Midsummer Day passed without any further mishap. We zig-zagged south, in and out, round the countless little fresh-water lakes and pools which lay embedded amongst the low hills, and most of which were sheeted with ice. After a while we saw another imposing range peeping up from behind the hills. Turdu Bai, who always led the way, wanted to cross it by the first pass we came to; but I said, "No; let us follow this wide glen which runs to the west-north-west." We did so, and

Fording a River in Northern Tibet.

stopped at the first pasture we came to, and were there greeted by a stinging shower of hail. Our first care was to examine and classify the animals. Those that were in good condition were let out to graze, but those that were not up to the mark were kept beside the tents. The Lama again bled my horse, and then gave him a long, icy-cold foot-bath in the nearest brook. After this the horse soon grew better, and grazed a bit, and then crunched a handful or two of maize. As we had still six camel-loads of rice left, I gave orders that in future the animals should have rice and maize mixed, partly to keep up their strength until we reached fresh grass, and partly to lighten their loads.

It was now two years since I started on this series of travels,

and as I looked back upon the work I had accomplished, I felt I had every reason to be satisfied and thankful.

It was a long time since we had come across any fuel, and the wooden frames of the pack-saddles had been used up as fast as the camels died. I could not work without a little brazier in my tent. It was stinging cold of a morning, and during the night the thermometer generally fell below freezing-point, so that for a couple of hours after daybreak the ground was hard.

On the 25th of June we travelled almost due west, following the latitudinal valley which ran parallel to the Arka-tagh on the south. We did less than twelve miles. I was making for the camp where we had rested on the 28th and 29th September, 1900, the position of which I had determined astronomically, and I now wanted to control it by a fresh series of observations. As is usual in these broad, desolate, sterile main valleys of the northern Tibetan mountain ranges, the scenery was absolutely monotonous, with scarce a trace of animal life. It was an important event when we caught sight of an orongo antelope scuttling across the valley. The surface was undulating, and the view not very extensive. We would see our guide sitting on his horse like a sharp-cut silhouette on the summit of the next ridge, and were led to think that the man had a boundless panorama spread out before him. But nothing of the kind. His road was stopped by another similar ridge, only a short distance in front of him. And so it went on, ridge after ridge, all day long, until we halted beside a tiny lake, ice-bound, but with open shores.

At dusk I inspected the camp as usual. It was seldom I now found everybody well. Hamra Kul was better, but instead of him Rosi Mollah, the priest, had sore-throat, and Mohammed Turdu, the old camel-man, complained of pains in the chest. I gave both of them some medicine, which, thanks to their own imaginations, soon made them better. In the meantime they were exempted from duty. Several of the other men complained of headache, and I gave each of them an antipyrin powder, and comforted them with the assurance that in those high altitudes nobody escaped without signs of *tutek*, or "mountain-sickness." For my own part, fortunately I never felt the least symptoms of it.

My horse was now out of danger, but several of the camels were wretchedly lean. As the two little camel foals were unable to get as much milk as they wanted, I had them fed with flour made into a paste; this they swallowed greedily when we put the

balls into their throats. At nine o'clock a storm came from the north, and the temperature went up to 8°.9 C., or 48°.0 Fahr.

We were evidently the first to penetrate amongst those mountains, for we failed to discover the slightest indications of previous visitors. We had long ago burnt our bridges behind us, and we were now entirely dependent upon ourselves. But—in proportion as we advanced amongst those barren and desolate mountains, so were our animals dying one by one, and those that still survived were growing every day weaker.

On the 26th of June we had very peculiar weather, gloriously bright in the morning, with warm summer airs; but it was not long before the wind began to blow with such violence from the west that we, who were riding in its teeth, literally gasped for breath. Even without that, our animals had quite enough to do to struggle along in the rarefied air, and an adverse wind tried them terribly. You might almost speak of a west monsoon, so consistently did the wind blow from one direction. It was precisely the same sort of furious gale, whirling the sand and dust high into the air, and threatening to buckle up tents and yurts alike, that we had encountered at Camp no. LVI. of the autumn before. Our present camp, no. XXIV., thus coincided with Camp no. LXI. of the preceding year, and gave me an invaluable point of control for my map. All that remained of our previous visit were the ashes and embers of our fires. We pitched our tents on the same spot, on the left side of the little brook.

The lake was still, for the greater part, coated with soft ice; it would be the middle of July before the ice all melted, and then early in November it would freeze again. The tendency of the different lakes to freeze, and the periods during which they remained frozen, naturally varied with the size, salinity, and more or less exposed situation of each lake. The little fresh-water pools close to the Arka-tagh remained frozen for the greater part of the year. We had, as I have said, summer weather, and at one p.m. the temperature, in spite of the tempest, rose to 20°.0 C., or 68°.0 Fahr. In fact, it was a warm current of air, a sort of *föhn*, which was sweeping across those lofty, icy uplands—a summer wind crossing the ice-bound lakes!

Here we rested a day, and I took advantage of it to fix the position astronomically. Meanwhile Sirkin and Turdu Bai reconnoitred the country to the west, and found no hindrance in our way. The Cossacks, with the view of marking this important point, built a double-headed landmark of slates, on which Sirkin

and Shagdur cut their names, whilst on another big slab our Lama engraved his everlasting "*On maneh padmeh hum.*" The *obo* stands on rising ground on the right bank, and will be easy to find should any traveller in the future chance to direct his footsteps into that region. In fact, if he carries my map with him, it is so detailed that he will be able to march straight to our camp. The Mussulmans, not to be outdone by the "unbelievers," built up a bigger pyramid for themselves.

On the 28th we continued south-west along the lake side, and soon came to another lake, which turned us to the south-east; although we were aiming in the former direction, so as

Our Landmark.

to avoid the difficult and mountainous country which we hereabouts got entangled in on our journey of the previous year.

On the 29th June we travelled 16¾ miles, making at first for a low pass, which, like the region in general, was free from snow. Its summit afforded a magnificent view of a fresh latitudinal valley, broad and flat, and studded with lakes. Of these the biggest lay in the south-west, and as it was free from ice we concluded that it was salt. On the farther side, that is the south, it was backed by softly-rounded hills of a fiery-red colour, which contrasted sharply with the glorious, pure ultramarine blue of the lake, especially as both were set in a landscape of monotonous grey.

Our chief want now was water. The watercourse which ran down to the lake contained a brook, but it was salt; nor was there any spring near the left shore. So Shagdur rode on a little bit, until he found a fresh-water spring. At sunset it was a dead calm; but at eight o'clock a gale set in from the north, blowing at the rate of 38 miles an hour. Its somewhat plaintive wail drowned every other sound, except the shrill shouts of the men when anything chanced to break loose or threatened to blow away.

Next morning we crossed the red heights beyond the lake without any trouble, but after that we had an extremely difficult march, for we had to climb over three passes, all cut through the soft red soil, plentifully sprinkled with bright crystals of gypsum. At last we struck a stream, which we soon recognised as the upper course of the one we had recently encamped beside. Had we had the least suspicion of the fact, we should, of course, have avoided the passes, and travelled up the bed of the stream itself, for it ran over hard ground. But, then, we were travelling in an utterly unknown part of the world, and it is just the discovery of these things that constitute the pleasure and fascination of travel.

On the 1st of July we covered almost exactly 17 miles. Before us rose an imposing mountain-chain, its upper reaches capped with snow which glittered like ice. This we had of course to circle round, either on one side or the other. While Chernoff tried it on the west, Cherdon and the Lama went to see what it was like on the east. The former soon came back, and said it would be impossible for the camels to get round that way; the latter reported that we could advance, but must prepare for a stiff climb.

Up we went, at a slow pace, towards the dizzy heights. The path grew steeper. The nearer we approached the snows the bigger waxed the stream, for it was fed by countless rivulets gushing out of every crevice. The water was thick and red, and poured, a heavy sullen flood, down the glen.

Vegetation ceased; there was not even a scrap of moss amongst the gravel. At length we conquered the last steep slope —we were on the top. The camels breathed hard; you could distinctly hear them labouring for breath. Some of the men, who had climbed the ascent on foot to look after the loads, flung themselves down on the ground. Everything danced before their eyes. On the top of the pass stood the Lama,

waiting for us, his red robe now rather less conspicuous than usual, owing to the predominant colouring of his surroundings. The rock was red conglomerate, and the whole landscape was tinged with its colour.

Although five of the camels were in a bad way, and three came up minus their loads, they all managed to reach the top of the pass, which was 17,511 feet above the level of the sea, a good deal higher than the Arka-tagh. But the pass was, fortunately, free from snow, and, again fortunately, we were spared the inevitable snowstorm. Leaving the snow-field, a thousand feet or more above us, on the right, we struck down the bare southern face of this dominating mountain-knot. There again we found a considerable stream, which curved away to the south-east, and disappeared amongst the rugged hills. As so often happened before, we were unable to ascertain where it went to; in all probability it emptied itself into some hidden lake. We pitched Camp no. XXVIII. on its right bank.

It had now become part of the established order of the day for the medicine chest to make its appearance at every camp, Chernoff had a splitting headache, Turdu Bai had a sore eye, and when I gave him cocaine its effect produced a profound impression upon the other men. The same result had been produced the day before, when I cured Hamra Kul of toothache with some "drops." Probably it was curiosity rather than actual need that now brought me three fresh patients; one of them, Islam Ahun of Charkhlik, in especial, complained of toothache. The truth was they wanted to see if the effects of the medicine really were in agreement with Hamra Kul's description. The worst case was Mohammed Tokta, who complained of his heart, and suffered from sleeplessness. I gave him morphia occasionally to make him sleep. For a long time past he had done no work, and he was destined never to do any more. My medicine chest was thus looked upon as a miraculous talisman. As soon as I produced it, all the men who were disengaged used to gather outside my tent. Many were the supplicating glances directed towards its brass lock during those long months. For my own part, I was only too glad never to have occasion to make trial of its contents.

On the 2nd of July we also had a good day, doing 16½ miles. The country consisted almost entirely of red sandstone. The worst of it was that the camels, in consequence of the insufficient pasture, were growing thinner and thinner, and were fast using

A Wounded Orongo Antelope.

up their strength. We had only three sacks of maize left. Should we—this was now the all-important question—should we reach better regions before it was too late?

At last we hit upon a valley that descended towards the south, but before long it contracted into a disagreeable, winding gorge, the bottom of which was choked with slabs of sandstone that hurt the camels' feet. To escape this we were forced to turn up over a low rounded pass, where Sirkin shot a little antelope. Yolldash rushed blindly upon the wounded animal, but was greatly taken aback upon being met by a pair of sharp horns. The men never indulged in hunting for the sake of mere sport, only when we were in need of food. Besides, we had to think of the ammunition. Each of the Cossacks had only 142 cartridges left—quite sufficient if it were well husbanded; but we did not know what the future had in store for us, and it was best not to waste it.

After crossing a flat saddle, we perceived beyond it a small lake, and its farther side was—green! An hour later we were amongst it; it was, it is true, very thin and short, but it was fresh and tender. And, to crown our good luck, there was an abundant supply of kulan droppings for fuel.

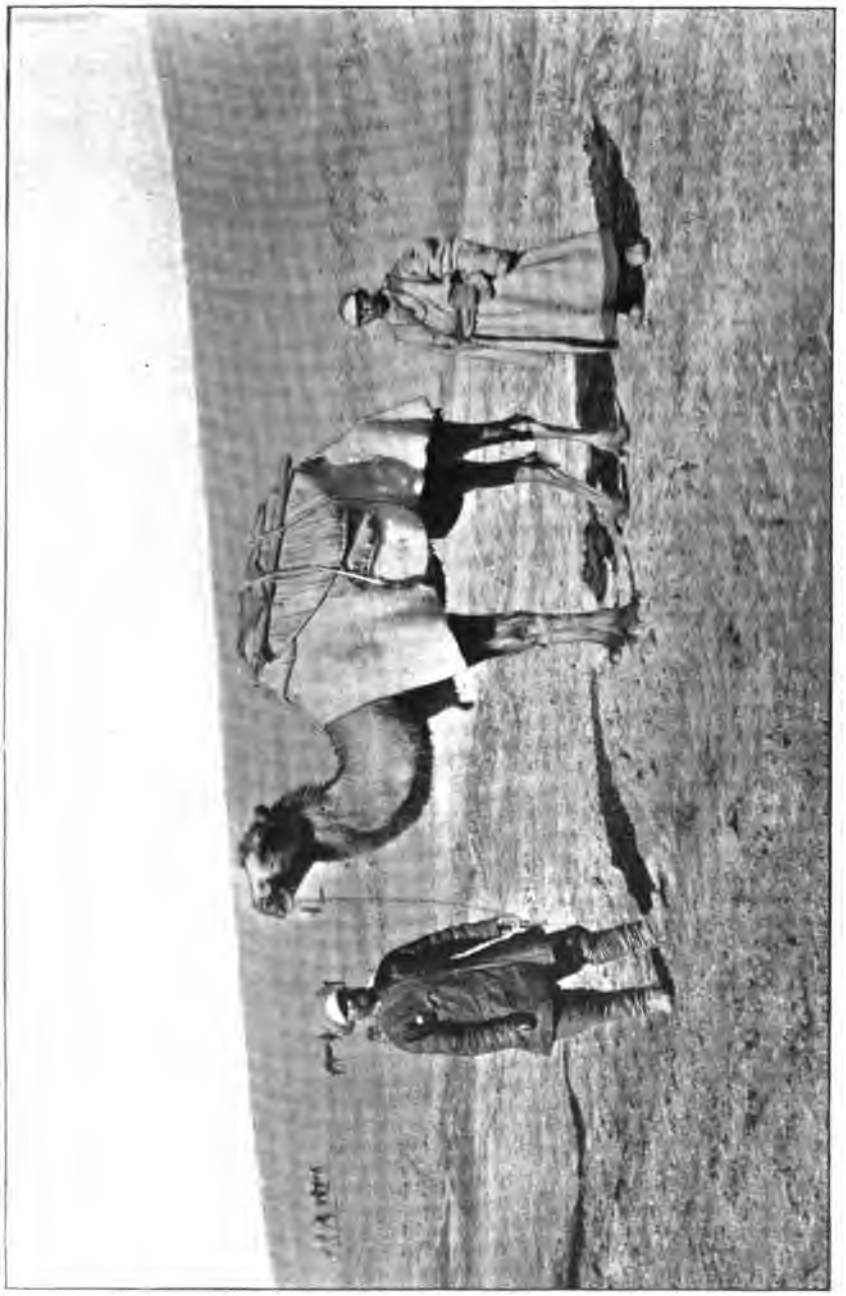
All day the weather was everything that could be desired—much too warm for winter clothing. There was one characteristic of the winds of this region which I had for several days observed. Almost invariably the west wind dropped at sunset. Then, whilst twilight lasted, it was a dead calm, so that I used to dine with a light burning and the door open. But shortly after eight down came the gale from the north, and in a few moments the camp was all confusion. The men rushed off in all directions, to fasten their tents, and hurry under shelter any things that chanced to be lying outside. The sparks from our fires whirled up like comets' tails, and we had to keep a good look-out to see that nothing caught fire. That evening the wind had a velocity of nearly 36 miles an hour. As a rule the storm continued as long as I was awake, or, say, until midnight; but when I was called in the morning, just before seven, the atmosphere was again in equilibrium. Thus there were two prevailing winds in those regions, a westerly and a northerly, the former blowing by day, the latter by night. Wherever accumulations of sand were formed, it was always on the west side of the north-and-south valleys—that is to say, on the side that was sheltered from the west wind.

Just before the storm burst that afternoon, our camp and its immediate surroundings presented quite an idyllic picture, if one may ever use the word "idyllic" with regard to a Tibetan landscape. The sun had set, but its purple afterglow still lingered in the heavens. In the east the moon, pale yellow and of a frigid aspect, slowly sailed across the dark blue sky, and filtered its rays through the thin white haze, throwing everything into magic relief—softening the harsh tints, and obscuring the sharp angularities. Across the moon hung a narrow, coal-black strip of cloud, like a black ribbon flung athwart a silver globe. It made me fancy that Saturn and his ring had somehow wandered astray in the heavens. The sky was in places fringed with light, fleecy clouds. The caravan animals were scattered over the hill-sides, eagerly plucking the scanty grass. Such camels as were not up to the mark lay huddled together beside Turdu Bai's tent; and close by were the two little ones with their mothers.

Here we stayed yet another day. According to my reckoning this was the valley in which we had buried Aldat the autumn before, though his grave lay nearly 20 miles farther to the east.

On the 4th of July we travelled almost due south, over a gently undulating surface, with thin grass, numerous salt pools, and an abundance of game, especially kulans and antelopes. Yak dung was very plentiful too, and, what was more to our purpose, it was dry. The ground also was in general remarkably dry, as compared with what it was the autumn before, when we were several times very nearly engulfed in the mire. But then it was a long time since there had been any downfall. When the wind blew, clouds of dust hung over the track of the caravan.

Once more we were approaching a fresh pass, which we reached by a steep, gravelly ravine. On the way up we dropped one camel. On the summit, 17,094 feet above the sea, the only vegetation was yak moss. Thence we had a most extensive view: for fully four days ahead there appeared to be no serious difficulties to encounter. But, looking back, what a very different view! Range behind range, crest overtopping crest, until the high-pitched horizon was closed by the mountain knot we had climbed round, with its lofty pass and its perpetual snow! The landscape was for the most part dressed in light shades, red predominating. Faint tinges of yellow and green revealed the pasture-ground we had recently left. In places the eye caught



The Veteran of 1896. Sirkin Holding Him.

the gleam of snow. The whole scene suggested a flat desert picture, and above the whole stretched the turquoise-blue canopy of the sky. We pitched our tents on the slope going down from the pass, at an altitude of 16,582 feet. We obtained water by digging a well in a dry watercourse, but next morning discovered a spring. Sirkin and Cherdon shot six brace of partridges; and in another place they bagged two yaks. Although we thus fared sumptuously, the poor camels looked wretchedly thin and miserable. Nor were the horses much better; here at Camp no. XXX. one had to be killed, and we were obliged to give the others a day's rest.

On these rest days Shagdur and the Lama were busily employed getting my Mongolian dress ready. A very remarkable change had by this come over the last named: his courage had grown, and he was now actually longing to get back to Lassa. All this while my lessons in Mongolian went on without interruption, and the Lama drew me plans of the holy city, its temples, and its squares. The enterprise, as a whole, now presented itself to him in rosier colours, and he was wont to express his views in the following pregnant sentence: "Mo bollneh ikkeh mo bollneh gué, sän bollneh ikkeh sän bollneh," *i.e.*, "Goes it bad, it goes not *very* bad; but goes it well, it goes *very* well."

Every evening, on the stroke of nine, I used to pay a visit to the big yurt inhabited by Sirkin, Shagdur, and the Lama, to examine the meteorological journal kept by the first-named, as well as to take the reading of the self-registering thermometer, a duty I always performed myself. Then I used to sit and chat with them for an hour, while Turdu Bai and Hamra Kul came and made their reports about their respective animals. That evening they told me there was scarcely a sack of maize left, and whatever the consequences might be for ourselves, we must give up all the rice and flour we could possibly spare for the animals. Turdu Bai considered it absolutely essential that we should hurry on in search of grass, and then allow the camels at least a month to recover.

Another item of news they brought me was less satisfactory, namely, that during the day nearly all the sheep had run away. They had not been missed until dark, but most of the Mussulmans had gone off in quest of them. Chernoff also joined in the search on horseback, taking some of the dogs with him. I was afraid it would prove a repetition of what had happened the preceding year, and was rather dreading the scolding I should have to give

to the offender. The plain truth of the matter was, the flock had been left to the tender care of Vanka, the ram; and indeed he had managed his business as well as any Mussulman. At ten o'clock the searchers came back tired, but without the sheep. They said they would wait an hour until the moon rose, and then go and look for them again. It was midnight when they finally returned; but luckily they brought all the sheep with them. They had found them in a side ravine, lying at the bottom of its deep watercourse.

As the animals' strength declined, so did our marches grow shorter and shorter. We seldom managed more than 12 miles a day now. But on the 6th of July they were slower than usual. I used to take the Lama and ride on in advance, and wait for them at the top of some pass; but that day our wait was a very long one.

We were now surrounded by primeval nature in its most desolate and deterrent aspects. Never before had a human being set foot in those wild tracts. Days, weeks, months passed, and we were the only human beings to impart life to the region. Orographically the same parallelism of the mountain-ranges obtained which we had observed the year before. Every chain and every latitudinal valley between them, as well as every individual summit, stretched from east to west, and as we were travelling south, we had necessarily to cross them all one after the other. Scarce a day passed without our climbing over some pass, and very often we had two or more to our credit in the day. Yet it was very strange how seldom the bare rock cropped out. Both that day and the next the surface consisted of soft, sandy material, dry and tolerably firm, though in the bottom of the valleys there was generally some gravel. Gradually the grass, too, improved. When we stopped, two of the camels lagged, as usual, behind; one of them was the veteran of 1896; his days were now plainly numbered. But before he died, I took the accompanying (p. 259) portrait of him.

CHAPTER XV.

FIRST CONTACT WITH THE TIBETANS.

On the 7th of July the going was unusually favourable; we had no pass to surmount, and the ground was firm. Our journey lay down the sloping side of a flat, open, cauldron-shaped valley, with an almost circular lake at the bottom. Its water was pure and intensely blue, girdled by a broad band of crystallized salt, which in the distance glittered like ice or snow. The western shore was overhung by heights of a brick-red colour. The strip of shore consisted of moist saliferous ooze, and it was no easy matter to obtain a canful of the water, to see what it was like. In fact it was only after Kutchuk had devised a pair of makeshift *ski*, or snow-shoes, that he durst venture to cross the dangerous margin. But the water contained such a heavy solution of salt that the areometer refused to sink by the half of its height. Of course the scale was no use at all, and we were forced to make a special mark on the glass. Fortunately, this treacherous strip of mire was sharply marked off from the slopes around by a distinct swelling. Passing the lake, we steered to the south-east, making for the mouth of a valley which led up to the next pass. We now began to look for water, for it was nothing like so plentiful hereabouts as in the Arka-tagh. I rode on first, to see whether there was a spring at the bottom of the valley. There we eventually dug a well, and at a depth of nearly two feet obtained cold, fresh water.

On the 8th of July, although we travelled no more than 8¾ miles, only 27 of the camels managed to reach camp—no. XXIII. (16,540 feet). They were now so far gone that we preferred to make a long detour round even insignificant passes, rather than risk losing one or two of the animals by crossing over them. But the pass which lay before us, 16,600 feet in altitude, could not be avoided, and our Lama, who had

reconnoitred it, assured us that it was not difficult. Nor was the ascent, indeed, of any account; still, it was hard work for our exhausted beasts. On the other side the contours were more intricate and unfavourable. There were several crests which would have to be got over by some means or another; and at our feet were four fresh-water pools, each embedded like a saucer amongst the hills. Shagdur went on in advance to examine the country, and came back and reported that the next pass would be too high for the camels. Already three were lagging behind, and, sooner or later, we should have to wait for them. This we did beside a fifth pool, although the grass was thin and poor. Next day two out of the three laggards managed to get up to the camp, the third lay stiff and cold on the spot where he had been left.

It was clear things could not go on in this way much longer. A change must be made in the order of our march. The best thing seemed to be to weed out the weak animals, and leave them to follow on slowly after, whilst with the rest I pushed on at a faster pace. The first step was to reconnoitre our position, for we were now, as it were, in a sack, from which we could not get out until we found a hole somewhere. Chernoff rode to the east; the road was blocked by steep cliffs. Mollah Shah, who tried the south, reported that the two or three low passes he had crossed were not particularly difficult.

Then we picked out eleven camels, five of which had carried no loads during the last two or three days, and six horses, and left them to get a few days' rest, after which they were to follow on our trail by short, easy stages. This important task I entrusted to Chernoff, and told off five men to help him—namely, Rosi Mollah, Mollah Shah, Kutchuk, Khodai Kullu, and Almaz, the last-named an old man from Charkhlik, whose euphonious name means the same thing as "jewel." I also left with them four of our dogs—Malchik, Hamra, Kalmak, and Kara-itt—as well as half of our surviving flock of sheep, now reduced to about a dozen. The selection of the animals was made with great care and circumspection by Turdu Bai and the Cossacks. At first only ten camels were picked out; the eleventh was added just as we were starting. Eight camel-loads of baggage, consisting exclusively of provisions, were left for them to bring on; but all the instruments and other important things we carried with us.

It was not at all convenient to divide the caravan in this

way just then, when we were approaching inhabited regions, and might perhaps require the whole of our strength undivided. But we had no choice in the matter, and I left the rear-guard well armed with two rifles and several revolvers.

I arranged with Chernoff that on hard ground, more especially when we kept to the watercourses at the bottoms of the valleys, or crossed hard gravel, we would leave heaps of stones to mark which way we had gone. I could not of course tell him where the main caravan would stop, for the simple reason that I did not know myself. It would all depend upon circumstances, principally upon the presence of grass, and the chance of encountering human beings.

A change in the weather occurred at Camp no. XXXIII. The morning was bright and clear; but at noon the hail was dancing a witches' carnival on the hill-sides; and the first squall was soon followed by a second. After that there was a drizzling rain for the rest of the day, and at nightfall it turned into a good, steady downpour. We did not derive much satisfaction from listening to the monotonous patter-patter of the rain, for we knew that every drop would only add to the weight of our loads by making tents and yurts as heavy as lead, and would at the same time convert the ground into a quagmire.

We said good-bye to the rear-guard on the 10th July. Chernoff understood that it would be a feather in his cap if he brought in the greater part of the eleven camels I left in his charge. After a big snowfall during the night the ground was heavy and slippery. Amid these dreary surroundings the caravan we left behind looked even more forlorn and wretched than usual. Only one or two of the animals thought it worth while trying to hunt for a bite in the slushy snow; the others just lay still and rested. The Mussulmans wished me a successful journey, and at parting I gave Chernoff a hearty grip of the hand. I should not see him again until after I returned from my pilgrim journey to Lassa—that is, if I did return.

All day long the weather was terrible. One burst of hail was so fierce that we simply could not face it, but were compelled to stop, wrapped in our cloaks, until it passed. Next moment the sun shone out, and dried us, until the sky opened its ready sluices again. I and the Lama rode on in advance to choose a spot to encamp in. We did 14½ miles; for although the caravan, having got rid of the worst animals, went better and travelled faster than usual, we still had to wait

a long time before they came up. This was too good an opportunity for the weather to neglect: it rained again—pouring down in torrents. The Lama sat repeating, with philosophic patience, his never-ending "*On maneh padmeh hum*," and let the 108 beads of his rosary trickle through his fingers as he recited.

On the whole, the day's march had been across favourable ground, especially after we had surmounted two low passes. On the southern slope of the second six wild yaks were grazing, and as we had for some time been without fresh meat, Sirkin and Shagdur took their rifles, and each brought down one. Then Turdu Bai and Ördek went with their knives and axes to fetch in the best pieces of the meat.

Meanwhile from the top of the pass (17,015 feet) I was enjoying the delightful prospect of open, level country for at least two days ahead. But my joy was short-lived; for right across the horizon, from the south-east to the south-west, stretched an unbroken chain of immense snow-fields, which, clearly, there was no avoiding. What scanty pasture there was in the broad, latitudinal valley, which, as usual, stretched from east to west, consisted chiefly of moss and wild garlic. This last was most welcome. It made nice flavouring for my soups. The Mussulmans chewed it raw, alleging that it was a preventive of mountain-sickness. The camels ate it greedily, preferring it to everything else. When there was nothing better to do, Turdu Bai used to set the men to collect this herb, and even on the march he used to stop occasionally, when it was plentiful, to give the camels a taste of its juicy and aromatic leaves.

Our next camp stood 16,346 feet above the level of the sea. The 11th of July was the anniversary of two events which have to do with altitudes. It was just four years since poor Andrée made his daring and in every respect successful ascent from Spitsbergen, and started on the journey from which he was never to return. I say deliberately "successful ascent," because the plan was so bold and grandiose in its conception—no other nation is able to boast of anything equal to it. It was also on the 11th of July, but eleven years ago, when I climbed to the top of Mount Demavend in Northern Persia. Then I had a hard day's work to do my 18,750 feet; but on that occasion I had only a single peak to climb, and it was surrounded by laughing valleys on every side; whereas here before me stretched a boundless expanse of barren uplands, across which we should have to drag ourselves with heavy, weary feet.

Our Camp of 13th July.

Our march ran east-south-east, and although we met with no obstacles, still we did not seem to approach perceptibly nearer to the snowy range which lay hidden behind its dark foot-hills. The rainfall was copious; the showers came too quick together for the ground to be able to dry between them. Consequently the surface was converted into mud, causing the camels to slip. Our Lama said it was the rainy season begun, and it would last two months. "At least, it is so in Lassa," he added. There is no need for me to describe the pelting showers we now encountered. They were in every way typical of the worst features of the worst Tibetan weather, and nothing could well be more villainous. The march was tiring and disagreeable. When we spread our beds on the ground they turned damp, and the yurts stunk vilely. It was seldom that I got an opportunity to use my camera or astronomical instruments, and the sheets of the map, upon which I was working, used soon to get wet, and then curled up.

The next day, after travelling east till noon beside the stream near which we had encamped, we turned south-east across gently undulating ground. But we failed to discover good water. The first pool we came to was salt. We dug a well; its water was salt. Then Shagdur took a couple of copper vessels, and went off on horseback; about an hour later we saw him riding back at full gallop. We wondered what he was in such a desperate hurry about. He said he had been attacked by a wolf, which had twice flown at him. Having nothing but the two copper vessels to defend himself with, he had flung them at the beast, and then taken to his saddle. Through the telescope we saw the big brute, almost white, following in Shagdur's tracks; but when Shagdur and Sirkin rode out to meet him with their rifles, Mr. Greylegs thought it best to show a clean pair of heels. That night we penned up the sheep more carefully than usual, and appointed men to watch the horses and mules.

Continuing in the same direction the following day, we traversed a region of rounded hills and ridges, with numerous salt-pools embedded amongst them, and crossed six insignificant passes before we reached a pretty large stream. But again we were disappointed. The water moved with painful slowness, and emptied itself into an elongated lake, with a belt of crystalline salt all round it. But whether the water from the lake was blown back up stream, or whether the stream itself originated in a formation impregnated with salt, anyway the water

was intensely salt. However, a little way further on we at length found a small pool of good water, so that at last the poor animals were able to drink their fill.

On a hillside near by the dogs set upon a big black yak bull; and for some time it was quite comical to see them and the yak dancing round and round one another, the yak snorting, puffing and blowing, with his tail in the air and his horns lowered, ready for a lunge. Yolldash, the cunning rascal, kept hanging on to his fringes. The yak's attention was so engrossed with the performance that I was able to photograph him; but unfortunately the negatives were not satisfactory. I almost thought it was a tame yak which had escaped from some Tibetans, he was so nonchalant.

In the middle of these proceedings Turdu Bai came and pronounced the yak's death sentence; we were in want of meat. The dogs were called off, and very soon two shots rang out simultaneously. But the yak seemed not to take the slightest notice of either reports or bullets. The dogs were let loose upon him again. But by this the yak had got his dander up, and he charged them in dead earnest. Up the hill they went; but all at once down came the yak headlong, and when we reached him he was quite dead. He was a magnificent bull; and the tips of his horns were worn and frayed from ancient battles with his rivals. After taking the best pieces of the meat and the fat, we left the rest for Shagdur's friend, the wolf.

It was a strange thing that we should go two whole days without finding water, especially as it was the rainy season, and there were pools in every direction. We certainly travelled ten or twelve miles from one fresh-water supply to the next. It was now a daily question—a question of the utmost, of vital importance—where we should find good grass, and make our headquarters camp. We were still very nearly 240 miles from the north-west corner of Tengri-nor; but we could scarcely expect to come across human beings before we reached the other side of the lofty range, which occasionally showed its snowy peaks above the hill-tops. The wild yak we had just shot had clearly never been in contact with human beings; otherwise he would never have allowed himself to be photographed at the cost of his own life. And yet, curiously enough, the skeletons and skulls of kulans and orongo antelopes were scattered all over the locality; these must have belonged to animals which died a natural death, or

were killed by wolves, for the Tibetans never meddle with kulans.

On the 13th we kept to the latitudinal valley, so as to spare the camels crossing any pass. The grass, however, was of the scurviest description, although we now came across a new species, which our Lama called *buka-shirik*, or "yak grass"; it was, he said, very common in the neighbourhood of Lassa, and along the routes the Mongol pilgrims take to that city. The whole region abounded in game—yaks, kulans, orongo antelopes, hares, and partridges. Upon reaching a brook which carried 177 cubic feet in the second, we thought it wisest to stop.

The Camels Fording a River.

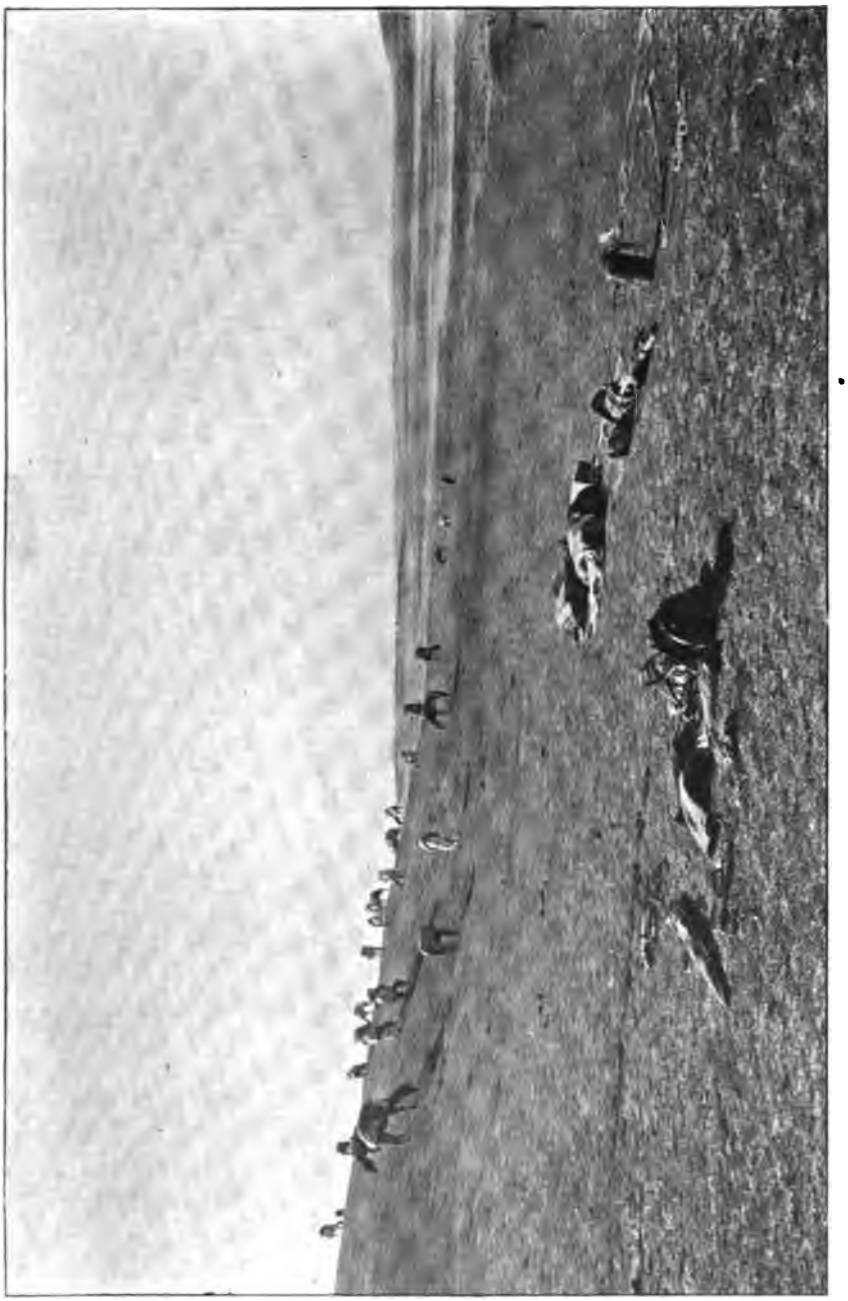
During the course of the day it rained, snowed, and hailed, sometimes in succession, sometimes all three together.

On the 15th of July the temperature rose to 11°.1 C., or 52°.0 Fahr., although the night before it was down as low as −3°.4 C., or 25°.9 Fahr. We still continued our south-east course, keeping a sharp look-out all the time for a gap or depression in the lofty range which parted us from the secrets of the Holy Land of the Lamaists. Once on the other side of that gigantic natural wall, which it was very probable was of climatic importance, and we should find it warmer, and meet with better grass, and no doubt human inhabitants as well. Up to the present we had not seen the slightest trace of human beings. About the middle of the day's march we crossed the biggest river we

had encountered since we left the Tarim. It flowed north-west into a very large lake, which we had only seen in the distance, as it glinted between the hills. The stream, which was divided into about a score of big arms, and the same number of smaller arms, had a volume of upwards of 810 cubic feet in the second, a velocity of two and a quarter miles an hour, and a maximum depth of just under two feet. Had the current been confined to one channel, it would have been impossible to get across without the boat. As it was, it took us a good half-hour to reach the opposite bank. Its bottom consisted of fine gravel. I was strongly tempted to unpack the boat, and sail down with the current into the lake; but upon second thoughts decided it would be wiser to postpone all such ventures until after my hazardous trip to Lassa was over.

In the far distance, up the broad open valley we were traversing, there appeared a tall, upright object moving towards us. We took it for a man, but could not be quite sure by reason of the distance and the reflection of the atmosphere. Sirkin, the Lama, and Turdu Bai, who examined the object through the telescope, were all positive it was a man; the Lama added, that he was gathering *argol*, or "yak dung," and that there were two black tents behind him. A little way back the hills on the left bank of the river we had just crossed were dotted over with yaks, numbering about 75. Tibetans with their yaks thus early! It was a stroke in our reckoning to be surprised in this way whilst on the march; it would make our Mongol disguise useless, and so upset all our plans. I also watched the approaching wanderer through the telescope; then we waited some time to let him come nearer. Finally, our man became transmogrified into a kulan, which we had seen in perspective. The black tents were nothing more serious than the shadows cast by the high banks of an eroded gulley, and the yaks were wild ones.

A little bit farther on Yollbars started a young hare, which, however, managed to escape into a hole. But even there poor puss was not safe, for Shagdur put in his arm and pulled her out. I took the timid little beastie, and stroked it and patted it, and when the caravan was safe past with all the dogs, I set it at liberty. Away it scuttled, overjoyed at its unexpected release; but before it got very far a hawk, which we had not observed, swooped down upon it. Shagdur hurried after it with his gun, but arrived too late. The leveret was dying, with its eyes picked out. *Incidit in Scyllam, etc.* It was little incidents like



Scanty Grazing in the Great Latitudinal Valley.

these that formed the only break in our otherwise monotonous marches.

Soon after this we came to the western bank of another river, which, a little farther down, obviously joined the one I have recently spoken of. Here the pasture was better than it had been for a very long time, and as there was also an abundance of fuel (yak dung), we decided to stop. The weather was glorious; flies even were buzzing about. A little higher up the hillside was dotted over with yaks, and there were more kulans and antelopes than we could count. Even partridges and wild-geese, with their young ones, were denizens of this uncommonly hospitable region.

Here, on the 16th July, we rested all day. I sent Turdu Bai and Hamra Kul to the head of the valley, to see if we could advance with the whole of the caravan; I did not want to turn back again. Just as I had got my theodolite set up for an observation, down came a terrific hailstorm. The sky turned black in the west, and the thunderclaps followed one another so swiftly that the earth literally shook. I was glad to creep under cover again. The hailstones rattled like peas on the canvas, and the ground was soon white.

Then we heard excited shouting. Cherdon, who was on duty for the day, announced that the other two Cossacks had routed out a big bear, and it was at that moment lumbering at a smart trot towards the camp. But, suddenly turning, Bruin plunged into the river, splashed across it, and clambered up the opposite bank, followed by the two horsemen at full gallop. Scarcely had they disappeared when crack went Cherdon's rifle. A huge whitish-grey wolf had sneaked close up to the camp, but now paid the penalty of his rashness.

An hour later, or a little more, we saw the two Cossacks coming back at a smart trot. They rode straight towards me, and even before they pulled up, it was plain that they brought important news. The bear, after a parting shot, managed finally to escape, though not before the two Cossacks rode plump into the middle of a Tibetan camp. At their approach a man, armed with a gun, disappeared behind a neighbouring hill, and there were horses grazing in the vicinity. Perhaps the score of yaks which we had seen the day before were *tame* ones after all. Then the Cossacks, who were not able to talk to the man, hastened back to bring me the news.

Now that he found himself face to face with realities, our

Lama was filled with consternation. So long as we were travelling through uninhabited regions, my plan, no doubt, appeared to him somewhat vague, and he had failed to realize it thoroughly. Now, however, the crisis was come. Having obtained touch with the natives, it was time for the caravan to halt, and for us to think of starting on our adventurous expedition. Perhaps, after all, the kulan we saw the day before was a man; at any rate, it was a warning, an indication that we were approaching inhabited regions.

We called a council of war. But there was no time to lose; the Cossacks were under the impression that the Tibetans had at once set to work to collect their yaks and horses, with the intention of striking camp. They must not escape. By hook or by crook we must get hold of them. In the first place, they would be able to give us valuable information about the routes and other circumstances. And it would be a good thing to try and win their confidence, and induce them to keep company with us, so as to prevent them from spreading the news of our approach; for, once it got wind, the tidings would, we knew, travel like wildfire all the way to Lassa.

The distance to their camp was, Sirkin said, not more than two miles. They must infallibly have seen us, for we had been where we were since the day before. Yet, were they Tibetan nomads, or were they Tangut robbers? Probably they were nothing worse than peaceful yak hunters, carrying meat and skins to the south. I had not expected to come across human beings thus early. It was strange, because we had not hitherto perceived any traces of old camp-fires.

In the meantime I ordered the Lama and Shagdur to ride to the Tibetan encampment as fast as they could, and detain the men in conversation. Before starting, however, my Cossack put on his Mongolian attire, and he looked the real thing in it. Indeed, that is what he was, for the Buriats are closely akin to the Mongols. I gave him some money to buy horses with, in case the Tibetans should have any to sell, and also let him take some tea and tobacco for presents, to convince them that they had to do with people who meant them no ill. The two men ploughed their way through the river, and disappeared in the twilight.

The moment which I had wished to postpone as long as I could was come quite unexpectedly. It would be an obvious advantage to have our main strength advanced as far south as

A Young Kulan Wounded.

possible, so as not to be cut off from it by too great a distance. We had already made up our minds to stop as soon as we came in contact with human beings, even though we should actually be on the march. The idea was that when we first perceived them, we pilgrims should don our disguise, ride back unseen, and approach the Holy City by a different road, so as to disarm any suspicion which might arise of our being connected with the big European caravan.

Some two hours later our horsemen returned; it was then pitch dark. The Tibetans were, however, already gone, their trail leading to the east; but their argol fires were still smoking when Shagdur and the Lama reached their camp. Shagdur thought that the first shot at the bear must have aroused them, and that they had begun to pack up on the instant. According to the Lama, they were three yak hunters; two or three heads and some hoofs were lying about in the vicinity. Our first idea was to pursue them; but, as they would probably travel all night and all the next day without stopping, we were forced to give up the idea; our horses were not fresh enough.

CHAPTER XVI.

QUAGMIRES AND SKY-SCRAPING PASSES.

FROM this day on there was no peace in our camp. Sentinels were posted at night, and the caravan animals were never let out of our sight. We lived pretty nearly as if on the war-path; indeed, I began to wonder whether it would not be too risky to leave the caravan at all. It would soon be well known that a caravan was approaching, and after I left them my men might be exposed to an attack. On this ground, therefore, after talking the matter over with Shagdur, I decided to leave Cherdon behind with Sirkin to defend the camp. Later on, when Chernoff arrived with the invalids, he, too, would materially strengthen the defence. Yet, as there was now no prospect of our reaching the Holy City before the news, exaggerated and no doubt perverted, of our arrival got there, there was the less need for us to make our headquarters camp where we were, especially as our horses were anything but fresh. To Lassa and back would have been a ride of over 650 miles, and that was certainly too much for our horses, especially if we attempted, as we should, to do the thing by forced marches.

However, we had to stay another day at Camp no. XXXVIII. to await the return of Turdu Bai and Hamra Kul. This delay we utilized in getting our Mongolian equipment ready, in case we should be compelled to slip away from the caravan at a moment's notice. Inside one of my Mongolian top-boots I contrived a sort of pocket for a thermometer, and made other pockets in the lining of my overcoat for my watch, aneroid, and note-book. Our two scouts turned up at dusk, and announced that as far as they had gone up the valley they had encountered no hindrance to our advance. In two or three places they noticed the remains of old camp-fires, which indicated that the valley was pretty well known to the yak hunters.

On the 18th of July we resumed our journey to the south-east, and crossed the river three times. During the day one of the camels, although apparently perfectly well—indeed, he was rather fatter than the others—barely managed to crawl into camp. Next day, as we could not induce him to move, we decided to leave him. It was only incorrigible laziness, and he would be picked up by Chernoff and his men. The Mussulmans said he would be quite safe from wolves, for, fierce though these animals were, they had never been known to attack a camel carrying a pack-saddle. All the same, we stuck up a spar of the yurt on a little hill close by, and tied to the top of it an empty preserved food tin, containing a strip of paper with the following message written in Turki: "We have left a camel here. If you don't see him, follow his trail till you find him." For we thought that, after he had rested a little, he might follow us in quest of his companions.

This was the first of the 18 to drop out of the ranks. The last we saw of him he was bending down his head to graze, and none of us ever saw him again. As it happened, Chernoff, who always encamped on the same spots that we did, made just here a detour, and never saw the camel at all. This was the only camel I ever left behind me alive without learning what became of him.

We now began to ascend, keeping on the left bank of the river. But the country soon changed, becoming bare and barren, and the weather changed too, for the summer warmth and the flies of the day before were succeeded by wintry snow and hail.

One day more and we should be in the heart of the snowy range which we had so long had on our right. The camels still held out, but their strength was fast sinking. The dromedary seemed as if he would be the next to go; he was nothing but skin and bone, and used to weep pitifully when we stopped. For supper we gave him a good bucketful of flour balls, the hay out of a pack-saddle, and two or three lumps of raw mutton-fat, which was said to be especially strengthening.

But the sun, as well as the alpine features of the landscape, was soon hidden behind impenetrable clouds. We were now going south-south-west, and the tempest—one of the very worst I have witnessed—drove directly in our faces. *Bashliks* (hoods) were no use whatever. The hail and snow met us horizontally, stuck fast inside the collars of our overcoats, and, melting, ran

down inside our necks. Every now and again we had to turn our back to the storm so as to catch our breath. To ride and write under such circumstances was no easy task. We felt—we could not see—that we were gradually ascending; but when the tempest lifted a moment we were disagreeably surprised to find that we were apparently no nearer to the snowy group. Still, we kept doggedly at it, gradually rising, but so gently, so slowly. In fact, the ascent was so imperceptible that at times I thought we were travelling over perfectly level ground; the rivulets alone showed that it was not so. But the poor camels! They slipped, and their feet sank in; and one actually went down with such a thud that the earth shook under him. What made the path so difficult was not only its loose consistency, but its saturated condition. Several glacier fingers stretched down towards the pass from both sides. All were completely buried under the snow; but from each of them trickled a rivulet. The margin of the glacier was literally black with yaks. We counted considerably over 300, many of them quite little calves. Cherdon shot one of these last to replenish our larder. As we approached them they gradually moved over to the south side of the pass.

Down the middle of the broad depression by which we were climbing up to the summit of the pass trickled a brook some two or three yards wide, and not more than three and a half feet deep. It was bordered with thick, moist yak-grass, and contained small fish. Yes, fish at an altitude of 16,500 feet! As usual I took specimens in spirits.

At length, however, brooks and rivulets came to an end, and the ascent grew steeper. With the Lama I pushed on to the summit. We were 17,921 feet above the level of the ocean, the aneroid registered 394 mm. (15.5 inches). The caravan was still struggling up the slope. The descent on the other side was blocked by a big yak, which looked very wild and threatening; his tail was curling backwards and forwards in the air, his horns were lowered, and he gave no sign of running away. We thought it wise to wait for the rifles; but when the first of the camels showed above the crest the yak lumbered off.

Meanwhile we examined, through the telescope, the country which unrolled itself on the other side of the pass. It was a chaos of mountain peaks and ranges, threaded by a tangled labyrinth of glens. A little way down we struck a pretty big stream, and decided to follow it. Here seven old yaks were

attacked by the dogs. Four took to flight at once. Three stood their ground; but when their enemies concentrated their efforts upon one of the three, the other two slipped away. The survivor had a lively time of it with his assailants, until he hit upon the ingenious tactics of taking his station in the middle of the river, where the water foamed about him, greatly bothering the dogs. After a while two of the other yaks returned to see how their comrade was getting on; but by that time the dogs had grown tired of the game, and were sitting on their haunches, with their tongues out, watching their victim.

Just as the men were taking the loads off the camels for the night, one of the Cossacks let fly with a shot-gun at a partridge which sat motionless right out in the open watching us. Then as she fluskered about in her dying agony, we saw that she was brooding three young ones, which ran about cheeping anxiously for their mother. Had it not been that this was a stingy land, and we were in absolute need of food, I should have felt like a criminal at disturbing the idyllic peace of such an innocent creature. As it was, it was a very long time before I got that cowardly shot out of my mind. The only thing that consoled me was that the partridge would, in any case, have been disturbed by the dogs.

After the heavy downfall of the day the ground was soft and spongy, and as the grass was not only scanty, but tough and hard, it came up by the roots when the camels pulled at it. Even then they had to browse a long distance before they gathered a mouthful big enough to chew.

The Lama, who was an intelligent fellow, observed quite correctly, that this stupendous mountain-range filled the same place in the Tibetans' regards that the Arka-tagh did in the case of the people of East Turkestan, in that it served as a frontier wall to shut out the unknown and the uninhabited, and formed a dividing line which was seldom crossed except by the yak hunters. Between these two ranges lay the highest, the barrenest, and consequently the most inaccessible parts of Tibet. We were now barely 170 miles distant from the northern shore of Tengri-nor, and we might expect almost any moment to stumble across the camping-grounds of the nomads.

When I awakened on the morning of the 21st July the snow was falling fast. Heavy clouds, almost black, hung about the crest of the snowy range; in fact, it was shrouded in them, and there would have been nothing to reveal its existence had

it not been for two glacier arms which, like the paws of a gigantic polar bear, stuck out from underneath the cloak of the clouds. I estimated that the limits of perpetual snow ran at about 350 feet above the pass, or say, 18,250 feet above sea-level. In spite of this stupendous altitude, we had no actual case of mountain-sickness, although Cherdon, who had been out after the yaks, complained of headache.

We followed the river due south, having the hail and rain in our faces all day. The wind blew up the pass with cutting keenness. A little way down our stream was joined by another from the right, and afterwards was deflected to the south-east. At the confluence two or three thick sheets of ice still survived, although with big cracks in them, through which we could see the water flowing on underneath. It amazed me that these fragile bridges did not collapse under the weight of the camels; but their surface was soft and decomposed, so that the animals walked as safely as they would have walked on gravel or sand. After a while the ice became thicker, and formed a continuous bank, with vertical or overhanging edges on each side of the glen, while down the middle between them flowed the river. We were marching on the right bank, but at a turn in the glen the ice was broken, and we were forced down on to the gravel at the bottom. The drop was 6½ feet down, so that we had to get out our axes, crowbars, and spades, and cut out a sloping path. This took a long time. Meanwhile Shagdur rode on to reconnoitre; for, to my eyes, this looked an extremely hazardous sort of road, especially as the gorge narrowed rapidly. After strewing the ice with sand, we cautiously steered each of the animals in turn down to the bottom, which was 60 to 120 feet wide. Then we travelled very often in the stream itself, the water splashing all about us. As the thermometer was a few degrees above freezing point, there was a continuous drip, drip from the edges of the ice. Altogether our surroundings were pretty moist.

After proceeding in this way for a good while we met Shagdur. He said we might go three or four miles farther; but then the ice came to an end, and the river was forced into a deep ravine, which it would be impossible to get through. If we did not look out we should be penned in both up-stream and down-stream. If the water came down upon us from above—and the river would very likely go on increasing in volume until a late hour of the night—we might not be able to turn back, and

the glen contained no bays or expansions into which we could lead the camels safely out of harm's way.

Right-about-turn, then, and back through all the pools and the river, and over the ice! It was water, water everywhere —water all around us, and the ice was cracking and crumbling fast. No doubt in winter the entire glen was sheeted with ice from side to side. It may appear amazing that such huge masses of ice as these should survive till the middle of July, but it was partly explained by the altitude and partly by the fact

The Two Ice Margins.

that the glen was screened from the southern sun by a precipitous cliff.

Upon reaching the confluence of the two streams, we turned up the tributary, leaving at the apex, between the two rivers, a cairn of stones, with an arrangement of other stones like an arrow pointing south-west, to show Chernoff which way we had gone. Thus, instead of descending, as we had hoped, into warmer regions, we were now led up a perfectly sterile glen to still higher altitudes. The hail came down more fiercely than ever, but we were now beyond caring what happened. We were dead beat, and as it was perfectly evident that we had another pass before us, and there was no hope of reaching pasturage until we got over it, we decided to stop.

Towards evening the sky cleared; the setting sun coloured

the clouds brownish red, and at dusk heavy rain-drops pattered against the yurt. I went to Sirkin's tent for a chat. We wondered how Chernoff was getting on with his exhausted camels. Then we discussed our expedition to Lassa. I suggested that we might smuggle two or three heavy and bulky articles with us in the stuffing of a mule's pack-saddle.

"No," said the Lama decidedly; "you are never safe in this country. They would perhaps steal the mules with their saddles and all."

Next day the country showed no improvement. Having built up another cairn, we proceeded to breast the pass. In the distance it looked a mere bagatelle; but in reality it was more difficult than the one we had crossed last. I rode on with the Lama up the river-bed, for that was the only strip of firm ground there was. Two paces out of the water and in dropped the horse above the fetlocks. The slope consisted of a gigantic sheet of mire, of the consistency of porridge, and to judge from the cracks which ran across it and all round it, the entire mass was slipping slowly, though imperceptibly, down the mountain-side. The immense altitude and the steepness of the slope, combined with the shifting and insecure foothold, were enough to play havoc with any caravan. And then, to make matters worse, a terrific hailstorm came on and drenched us all to the skin. It took the camels two hours to get to the top, and only fifteen of them turned up. Two were left behind, each in charge of a man. But the southern declivity was ten times worse than the ascent. There was not an inch of firm ground, and it was absolutely impossible to ride. One man went on first to pick out the way. Turdu Bai followed him with the camels, urging them on as fast as he could, to prevent them from sinking too deeply in the mire. However, that did not help much. A scream arose. The cord by which one of the camels was tied to another in front of him was drawn too tight, and cut his nose, owing to his having lost his feet. Up rushed the men to help him. Off came his load, and he was hauled up. Then on the string of camels proceeded again. The ground was so soft and soppy that when a camel lifted his foot, the hole closed up again. The rain came down in a deluge. The clouds covered us as with the darkness of midnight. Not a ray, not a glint of light broke through. Men and animals alike were dripping wet. Breathing was difficult and painful. What a ghastly land! It was amazing to me that the camels pulled through at all.

Even the mules began to get into difficulties; one of them stuck fast in the morass, and it cost us no end of trouble to get her out. Not only had men refused us their assistance, but the very elements, the earth itself, were conspiring to torture us to death. We should never reach those refreshing pastures, that blessed rest that we dreamed of at nights! How on earth would Chernoff's wretched camels ever get through? I fully made up my mind that not a single one would survive the two passes and the shifting mire, which every additional shower would of course make worse and worse.

At length we reached a pretty big stream. Where it came

Hewing a Path Down off the Ice.

from, and where it went to, we could not see; the snow was so thick, and the rain came down in such torrents. One consolation, however, we had: the gravelly bed was firm, and we were no longer in danger of being swallowed alive. We were all so thoroughly soaked, that splashing down the middle of the stream could not make us wetter than we were. A little bit lower down I observed some grass on the right bank, and there too, Shagdur picked up a big earthenware vessel. From its size the Lama inferred that it had belonged to strangers, and not to the nomads of the neighbourhood; *they* would not drag about with them such a big thing. It had evidently been left by the yak hunters in what was a permanent camp.

Of the two camels which had been left behind, only one succeeded in reaching camp; the other stopped just below that miry pass, and Hamra Kul proposed to stay with him all night. The poor beast was literally swallowed up in the mud, and all attempts to get him out failed. Hamra Kul sent to ask me what he was to do. I instructed two men to return to him with food and fuel, and to stay all night beside the camel, and in the morning, when the ground was frozen a little, they were to try their best to get him up with spades and felts. Besides that, I promised I would also send back all the other men to help them; for about half a mile lower down Li Loyeh had discovered good pasture, so that we should stay there all the next day. But all our preparations to save the poor beast, which was otherwise sound and well, were unavailing. The men found him in the morning dead, frozen fast in the treacherous soil.

During the course of the next day, Sirkin and Shagdur, who had been out hunting, reported that two or three miles further on the valley was studded with low hills, covered with beautiful grass, much better than any we had hitherto come across. Turdu Bai, in fact, spent most of the day down there; he could not tear himself away from the pleasure of seeing the camels eat. There was grass enough, he declared, to last for a month, and a good long rest was the only thing that could save the caravan. Upon hearing this, I immediately made up my mind that that was the place for our headquarters camp. There the tents should be erected, the loads stored, and the whole entrenched. Then, after determining the position of the place astronomically, we would put the finishing touches to our Mongolian equipment, and make a start for Lassa. And it was high time. Two or three of the Mussulmans, who had been out collecting fuel, had heard a shot. Probably we had neighbours, and it would be as well to keep a sharp look-out.

Originally I had intended taking with me to Lassa both the Buriat Cossacks as well as the Lama; but since our approach had now certainly been reported by the yak hunters we unexpectedly stumbled across, I dare not leave my main camp with only one Cossack to defend it. Even though the probability was slight, that the Tibetans would make an attack upon our base, still it was more prudent to be prepared for any eventuality that might happen; and it might be a long time before Chernoff came up with the rest of the caravan. I decided, therefore, to

leave Cherdon behind; his repeating rifle would be a formidable addition to the defences of the camp. I was extremely sorry to have to tell him my decision, and put it off as long as possible. I knew it would be an intense disappointment to him, for amongst Lamaists the pilgrimage to Jo (Lassa) counts as high in point of sanctity as the pilgrimage to Mecca does amongst Mussulmans. But, by way of comforting the poor fellow, I told him there was little likelihood of our breaking through the jealous cordon which the Tibetans undoubtedly kept upon their city, and I promised him that he, as well as his comrades, should visit some holy temple or another before the journey came to an end. Now a Cossack does not, as a rule, show what he thinks or feels; he simply answers, "Thank you, sir." His one law is obedience. But I understood only too well what this change of plan meant for honest Cherdon.

This decision meant also a great difference to us three pilgrims, in that it diminished our strength by one-fourth. Still the enterprise was altogether so risky, that it would make very little difference whether there were three of us or four.

On the 24th of July we moved down to the place where the Cossacks had found the promising pasture. The distance was barely two miles; but on the way my mind was assailed by anxious thoughts. Would this be the last occasion on which I should travel with my caravan? Should I ever see them again? Would they be left alone in peace until I returned?

The glen descended steeply, the river tumbling from step to step in foaming cascades. We crossed it repeatedly. The grass on the hills through which it wound its way gradually improved. Not that it ever became thick and continuous, but it grew in patches, and was fairly sappy and luxuriant, especially on the slopes that were exposed to the southern sun and sheltered against the cold north winds. The place I chose for the important camp was the flattened top of a rounded hill, close to the left bank of the river, at an altitude of 16,822 feet. But although the grazing was all that the men promised, the camp was badly chosen from a strategical point of view, seeing that it was commanded on all sides by the hills which surrounded it. If a band of Tanguts took it into their heads to open hostilities, they could scarcely wish for a more favourable situation.

I appointed the 27th of July for the start. On the last evening I locked up the valuable boxes I was leaving behind me, except the chronometers, packed in cotton wool in their respec-

tive cases. These I left in charge of Sirkin, after instructing him to observe the utmost caution in winding them up. And he was cautious, much too cautious; the very first evening after we left one of them stopped, because Sirkin was afraid to wind it up fully, for fear of breaking the springs. And the same thing happened to the other one the second day. However, no great harm was done, for I had subsequently an opportunity to repeat the observations which I took here at Camp no. XLIV. During my absence it was also Sirkin's business to take charge of the meteorological observatory, and this he carried through without a hitch. In the presence of all the men I formally nominated him chief of the headquarters camp, directing them to obey his orders as though they were issued by myself. To Turdu Bai, however, owing to his skill and experience in the management of camels, I reserved the right to propose a shift of camp whenever he should deem it advisable. He thought that they could remain where they were for ten days, and then make a short flit. It was further agreed between us that when they moved they should leave at this camp a document, telling us in which direction they had gone and how far, and at each successive camp a similar document.

I talked to each of the men separately and exhorted them to do their duty. Li Loyeh had his own private plans. He had asked permission to accompany me to Lassa, and when I gave him a decided refusal, he begged to be allowed to return to Charkhlik by the way we had come, over the mountains—a distance of 570 miles. Then came Mollah Shah and Hamra Kul, who said they wanted to go with him. Realizing better than they did the utter absurdity of the thing, I quietly answered them that they were perfectly at liberty to do as they pleased. But under no circumstances could I spare them horses, so that Li Loyeh, who was the only one who had his own horse, could alone ride. I promised to give them provisions, besides which Li Loyeh had his own gun of native manufacture. Then I took out the general map I had made of the journey, and pointed out to them each separate station where we had encamped all the way from Charkhlik, and wound up by sketching to them the probable issue of their mad attempt. Mollah Shah, who was an old man, would be the first to give in, and would be left behind, for he could not suppose that the other two would hamper themselves with a sick man. Then it would be Li Loyeh's turn, for he was not over and above strong. Hamra Kul, being

a big powerful man, might, I said, if he were fighting for his life, succeed in struggling back to Charkhlik, but he would never do it. He would be torn to pieces by the wolves in the Arka-tagh. I wished them a successful journey, and prayed that Allah would keep His protecting hand over them.

Now, whether it was that this sketch made a deep impression upon them, or whether they came to take a more sensible view of the matter—anyway, in the evening they appeared at my tent, and penitently flinging themselves upon their knees, besought me, in the name of all that was holy, to let them remain with me, which I of course granted. I never ascertained what evil it was had entered into them, and I was too much taken up with my own enterprise to get to the bottom of it. They swore that it was simply a longing for home; but the same day Sirkin discovered in one of the glens behind the camp the fresh track of a man, who sometimes walked, sometimes rode, and during the last night or two the dogs had barked furiously. It was already whispered in camp that the Tibetans were spying upon us, and had us under constant observation. This, however, I did not believe, because kulans showed themselves now on the one side and now on the other of our route, and the track Sirkin noticed might equally well have been made by them. A score of ravens were very busy flitting about the camp—under the existing circumstances no very happy augury.

Finally, I had a talk with Sirkin, and unfolded to him the serious nature of the risk we were running. He listened silently, and gravely shook his head. "If we are not back in two and a half months' time," I said, "you are to break camp and return to Charkhlik, and from there go to Kashgar." I did not really think we should lose our lives; but I must of course prepare for the worst eventuality, and make the best arrangements I could for securing the safety of my maps and note-books. I gave him the key of my treasure-chest, so that he might have the means wherewith to equip a fresh caravan at Charkhlik. I also gave him the general map I had made of our route, although the sense of locality possessed by the native Mussulmans would be quite sufficient to enable them to find their way back. Although there was, of course, little likelihood that a single camel would survive the journey back, still some of the horses might possibly struggle through, and Sirkin knew which were the boxes he had to save at all costs. And no matter how long they might remain at Camp no. XLIV., they were to keep strict guard both

day and night, and the animals were never to be let out to graze without two armed men and two or three of the dogs accompanying them. After that I went to bed, for the last time for several days under "civilized conditions." I dropped to sleep at once, and did not wake until Shagdur came and called me next morning, and said it was time to start.

X.

A Dash for Lassa.

The Forbidden Land of the Holy Books.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE START FOR LASSA.

DURING the two days we rested at Camp no. XLIV. the five mules and four horses which we intended to take with us had been looked after with especial care. They were reshod, and their saddles and rugs repaired. The whole of our baggage was squeezed into two Mongolian boxes. The only instruments I carried with me were three mariner's compasses, two watches, an aneroid, two thermometers, three pairs of coloured wire spectacles, and the Verascope camera, with eight dozen plates. In addition the following articles were absolutely indispensable :—The sheet of the map of Asia, containing Lassa, by the General Staff of the Russian Army, small note-books for my diary, and others for the itinerary, ink, paper, and pens, measuring compasses, razor and soap, scissors, a lantern, an axe, a dozen stearine candles, and boxes of matches, some medicines, ten yambas (£75 to £100) in silver. Our provisions consisted of flour, rice, talkan, and meat; but I only took ten tins of preserved foods, just for the first day or two, and each tin as it was emptied was filled with stones and dropped into a lake or stream for safety's sake. Our weapons consisted of a Russian repeating rifle, a Berdan rifle, and a Swedish army officer's revolver, with 50 cartridges for each. Besides this, we each carried upon our persons a number of small things which the Mongols never go without—for instance, round my neck a rosary, and a *gavo* (a case for holding a sacred talisman), with an idol inside, whilst at my girdle hung a case-knife, Chinese ivory chopsticks to eat with, a skin tobacco-pouch, a long pipe, and tinder and flint. Each man was provided with a double suit of clothing, for we were not likely to travel far without getting wet through. All our utensils, such as cooking-pots, jugs, cups, etc., were of genuine Mongolian make. We selected the smallest and lightest

of the yurts to sleep in, and last, but not least, the Lama made a comfortable cloak of thick white felt for use whilst doing sentry-go at night. Everything that would have been likely to excite the suspicion of the Tibetans was hidden away in one of the boxes underneath our stock of provisions. Most of them were of such a character that, in case of urgent danger, they could, without serious hurt, have been put under water. But things would have to get pretty bad before I should willingly consent to part from my instruments and note-books.

When Shagdur called me, I made haste to don my disguise, stuffed the instruments I should want on the journey away into their respective hiding-places, and felt that I was now a Mongol indeed. Even from the very first I was quite at home in my new coat, which was of a dark-red colour. It was soft and comfortable; and the only thing I missed about it were the many convenient pockets with which my ulster was provided. The compass and route-book I simply stuck inside my coat, trusting to the girdle to keep them in place. My head-covering consisted of a yellow cap, with turned-up flaps. For some time past I had been wearing the coarse, clumsy Mongol boots, so as to get them easy and comfortable; besides, I had found them very serviceable on wet ground, because of their thick soles and turned-up toes.

It was a bright, sunny morning, and the air full of flies and butterflies, so that I did not require my big yellow overcoat. The horse I had chosen to ride upon was my favourite white one. It was now perfectly well again, and I was in the act of adjusting the soft Mongolian saddle, when Sirkin came up behind me and addressed me in Mongolian; but he was taken rather aback, and quickly checked himself, when he saw that it was I. He had taken me for the Lama. The mistake rather flattered me: it showed me that my disguise was not amiss.

All the dogs were tied up except Malenki and Yollbars, who were to go with us. Our little caravan was loaded up, we mounted, and were off. Sirkin turned his head away to conceal his emotion; Hamra Kul wept like a child, and followed us a little way on foot, tramping unheedingly through the river in his distress. Camp XLIV. disappeared behind the hills. We rode at a smart pace down the glen. Should we ever see that peaceful spot again? I did not doubt the Almighty Hand which had hitherto guided my steps across the deserts and over the mountains. Shagdur simply revelled in the prospect of the

The Author in Mongolian Dress.

adventures which were now beginning. As for the Lama, he was as unruffled as a bowl of sour milk, and when, according to the understanding arrived at at Kum-köll, I asked him if he wished to stay behind, he refused to hear of it. He would not desert me, he said, but would go with me even though it cost him his life.

Shagdur rode a yellow horse, and the Lama the knowing little mule which we very nearly lost the year before, beside the lake where the two cairns of stones were erected. My two comrades led the pack animals, while Ördek, who rode the fourth horse, gave an eye to the loads. I was taking the last-named with us to watch the animals the first two nights, after which we should have to watch them ourselves. Cherdon and Turdu Bai also went with us for two or three hours, and then, after a last farewell, they too turned back.

The glen we travelled down was narrow, and hemmed in by steep hills. For the most part the current ran in a single bed, but in places was divided into several arms. The volume of the stream was immensely increased after the last two days of sunshine, which had caused the glaciers to melt faster. At the very beginning of the journey we crossed the river no less than nine times. At the sharp turns its banks shot down vertically, and several brooks, fed by natural springs, joined it from the left. The prevailing rock was red sandstone; but it was so disintegrated that the hard rock was a rarity—it was mostly gravel and big stones that we saw. Owing to this the entire landscape wore an aspect of redness. At one spot on the right bank two small heaps of stones appeared to indicate a ford, and, sure enough, close by we discovered traces of a hunters' camp—namely, three smoke-blackened stones arranged for the support of a cooking-pot. Another evidence of the presence of visitors was a dead yak, which had been shot not very long before, though it was now dried up, and either that very day, or the day before, there had been a bear prowling about it.

After fording the river two or three times more, we emerged upon an open expanse of country, with no mountains in sight except in the extreme distance. Here we left the river, which turned to the north-east, whilst our route lay to the south-east. The southern faces of the mountains behind us bore far less snow than their northern faces. Kulans, hares, and marmots, in addition to a single wolf, were the principal creatures we noticed on the open plain. Upon reaching an open basin

beside a spring (*namaga*), where the grass was luxuriant, we pitched our first camp. One reason why we stopped here was that one of the mules was beginning to limp badly. I made the fire, whilst the men did the rougher work. The horses and mules were hoppled by means of a rope going from one fore leg to one hind leg, so as to prevent them from straying too far. After that we prepared our simple meal of roast meat, rice, bread, and tea. When the meal was served, we ate it with our hands and the Chinese chopsticks, and drank out of a little wooden Mongolian cup; spoons and forks were luxuries we did not defile our boxes with. Our Lama, however, had no appetite; in fact, he seemed to be in a decidedly bad way, and complained of headache. It would be very hard if he was going to fail us now after we had got him so far; but he was so very much out of sorts, that I was really afraid he would have to return with Ördek.

I spent the afternoon stretched out on the ground, and got a good baking from the sun; but at eight o'clock we all went to bed, for the simple reason that we had nothing else to do. While we three pilgrims crept into our tent, which we shared in brotherly fashion together, Ördek kept an eye upon the animals. There was a bright moon, and how glad I was we had it during the trying nights that awaited us. I decided to take Ördek with us yet another day, for our Lama was really far from well. He reeled in his saddle, and had to keep getting off and lying on the ground.

The surface was hard and very favourable, and we did 24 miles with the greatest ease. Although the hills and valleys we passed on the way were scantily furnished with grass, yaks and kulans were remarkably numerous. Occasionally we counted them by the hundred; but then there was any amount of moss and herbs, which our tame animals would not look at. Every now and again one of us would ride on in advance to the top of the next rising ground and take a peep over on the other side; but as yet we saw no signs of human beings. Not that we were now anxious to shun them; on the contrary, if we came across a nomad camp, or mounted men, we should first endeavour to get Ördek away unperceived, so that he might return to Camp no. XLIV., and then, like the honest pilgrims we were, we should ride straight towards them. We were now travelling east-south-east, having before us, on the eastern horizon, a gigantic snow-capped mountain-mass, with a beautiful blue lake

Our Start from the Headquarters Camp.

at its foot. Upon reaching the lake side, which we had meant to follow to the south-east, we were turned back by vertical sandstone cliffs, which rose sheer out of the water, and were of the same brick-red colour which was so characteristic of the Tibetan landscape thereabouts. After a wearisome detour over a series of low hills we once more struck the lake, and found ourselves confronted by fewer difficulties. Concentric rings of beaches and terraces round the shore showed, at a glance, that the lake was shrinking, and consequently must be salt. And, as a matter of fact, it was absolutely destitute of life, and the ground all round it perfectly bare—there was not even so much as a blade of grass.

We did not want to tire our animals too much, and it began to be time to think of stopping; but it was no use looking for fresh water anywhere near the salt lake. However, after advancing for some distance along a kulan track, we caught a glimpse of another lake, somewhat smaller, but, strange to say, containing fresh water, although its surroundings were just as flat and dreary as those of the salt lake. Here we made our second camp. Our Lama was now a good deal better, and we were all in very good spirits. For some time we sat round the fire and chatted, and discussed our plans for reaching the holy city. I reckoned out how long our march had been, and how much farther we had to go. The Lama described the strictness with which the Tibetans examined, in Nakkchu, all pilgrims who arrived from Mongolia; we therefore thought it best to avoid that route, and, road or no road, make our way as best we could to the eastern end of Tengri-nor, and thence go down upon Lassa by the pass of Lani-la. In this way we should strike the great pilgrim road between Nakkchu and Lassa, and so could mingle with the stream of pilgrims unobserved.

Then followed a comical scene: my head was to be shaved. I sat down on the ground beside the fire, and Shagdur played Vandal's havoc with my hair. After he had cropped me as close as the scissors would go, he soaped my head well all over, and then Ördek appeared on the scene with his razor. Within a few minutes my head was as bright and smooth and round as a billiard-ball. Shagdur and the Lama looked on, intensely interested. Then I laid hold of my moustaches, and in a trice they were off, although I confess I thought it was a pity to spoil in this ruthless way the appearance of a not bad-looking fellow. I congratulated myself that I was allowed to keep my eyebrows

and eyelashes. When the process of spoliation was completed, I confess I looked perfectly hideous—worse than Cæsar's bust. But there was nobody to see me, and my appearance was quite in keeping with those bare, close-shaven uplands.

But I was not yet done with, for our Lama still had to have his turn. Like an experienced quack and old hand at the business, he began to rummage amongst the paper pokes and pouches, in which he kept his medicaments, and then with a light touch smeared my face all over with grease, soot, and brown colouring matter, until it shone like a cannon-ball in the sun. A little hand-glass, which I had with me, speedily convinced me that I looked the genuine thing. I was almost afraid of my own self, and had to study my visage a long time before I succeeded in convincing myself that the Mongolian baboon I was looking at really was the same person as my father's son. After the concoction had dried my complexion became a dirty grey.

CHAPTER XVIII.

A NIGHT ATTACK.

Our camp stood on a tongue of land between the two lakes, and in a quite open situation, except for a few low hills on the south-west. Here we regarded ourselves as absolutely secure, for we had not observed the slightest traces of human visitors, and our dogs were perfectly quiet. About five o'clock the wind set in from the north, and drove clouds of sand and dust across the salt lake and over our camp. We of course took refuge in the yurt, and by eight o'clock, it being then almost dark, we crept in under our furs and felts. Ördek was about 200 yards away, guarding the horses and mules. He was to remain up all night, so as to give us an opportunity to get a last good sound sleep, and in the morning he was to return to Camp no. XLIV.

At midnight the tent-flap was lifted. Ördek put in his head and cried in a terrified whisper: "Bir adam kelldi!" "There's a man!" His words acted like an electric shock. We all three jumped up, seized our rifles and revolvers, and rushed out. The storm was still raging; the moon hung pale amid tattered, swift-flying clouds. Ördek led the way, telling us as he ran how he had seen a dark spectre stealing in amongst the horses. But he was so terrified that, instead of shouting an alarm, he had run off to the tent to tell us. The consequence was that we of course arrived too late. In the dim light of the veiled moon we could just discern two dark mounted shadows hurrying off, driving two loose horses in front of them. The next moment they disappeared behind the hills. Shagdur fired, but without effect. Then he, the Lama, and Ördek hastened in pursuit of the robbers, whilst I remained behind to guard the camp; perhaps it was even now surrounded by the

accomplices of the depredators. My men returned in about an hour, after what had proved a bootless errand.

We at once held a council of war. The first thing was to count our animals; all the mules and the two worst horses were still there, quietly grazing. But our two best horses, my white one and Shagdur's yellow one, were missing. From the tracks it would appear that three mounted men had stolen upon the camp in the teeth of the wind. They had approached on foot, leading their horses, which they hid in a depression or dry watercourse that ran down into the lake. From there one of the men approached the camp alone, creeping on his hands and knees, until he came quite close to the two outermost horses. Then, suddenly jumping up, he drove them down towards the lake, where his two companions were waiting with their own horses. Then mounting, they galloped off over the hills. It was just at this moment that we saw them as we rushed out of the tent. I think I was never more annoyed in my life. To have our horses stolen from under the very nose of our own watchman, with two big savage dogs to help him! My first impulse was to abandon the expedition to Lassa altogether, and make the thieves pay dearly for their temerity. I felt inclined to track them down, even though it should take weeks, and then surprise them in the same way. I entirely forgot to scold simple Ördek; he had always proved a capable man hitherto. But his real place was in the desert, and similar uninhabited regions; he was in some respects right when he said that men are the worst enemies you have to contend with —far worse than tigers and sand-storms.

But after a while my indignation cooled down, and I was able to take a calmer view of the situation. We again followed the trail to the top of the hills, and there found it disappear amongst the hard gravel. Shagdur could with difficulty be restrained from pursuing the thieves; his weapon actually burned his hands. He was desperately loth to lose his horse, which he had cared for like a child. But he also quieted down when I told him that these men, whether they were professional thieves or simply yak-hunters who thought the opportunity too good a one to be lost, would certainly not stop until a late hour the following night. Besides, there was not the remotest prospect that we with our stale horses would be able to overtake them. They were our best horses they had taken, and their own animals were no doubt full of go, and

A Night Surprise

habituated to the mountain-air. And then they knew the lay of the country, while we were entirely ignorant of it; so that they would be able to take advantage of the river-courses and gravel-beds, both to hide their own trail, and to lead us astray with blind ones. Finally, if two of us pursued them, and two stayed behind, we should still further weaken our little company, which was much too weak even as it was. That idea must, therefore, be abandoned; it was too risky. We might congratulate ourselves that the robbers had been content with two horses; and I consoled Shagdur by telling him that had I been in their place I should have stolen *all* the horses, so as to render it quite impossible for us to pursue.

This was a lesson to us. The difficulties of the enterprise were now upon us in real earnest, and we must make up our minds to be more vigilant. Even in the midst of these lonely, dreary mountains, a band of robbers had sprung up, as it were, out of the very ground, and carried off our horses without so much as a dog barking. In all probability they had no connection with the yak-hunters whom we saw at Camp no. XXXVIII.; it was much more likely that the footprints which Sirkin noticed in the valley, and the shot which the Mussulmans heard about the same time, had something to do with our midnight visitors. And no doubt they had kept us steadily in sight since then. Being afraid to tackle the big caravan, they had retired into some hidden glen, and there lain in wait for the opportunity which they no doubt foresaw would sooner or later come. They had watched us, the little pilgrim band, set out, had followed us stealthily at a distance, dogging us like wolves from behind the hills, and, finally, had availed themselves of the storm which came on to accomplish their nefarious purpose. But we were determined to profit from the experience. From this moment onwards we must live as if we were in an enemy's country, and be prepared, at any hour of the day or night, for an attack from the most unexpected quarter.

Sleep was out of the question for the remainder of that night; so we made a little fire outside the yurt, and crouched round it. Wrapping ourselves in our overcoats, and lighting our pipes, we sat and talked, the moon peeping out at intervals from between the lowering clouds. Towards daybreak we boiled the kettle for tea, and that, together with rice and bread, constituted our breakfast. Then we made an early start. I and Shagdur mounted the remaining two horses. As for Ördek, he

sat over the fire weeping, beside himself with terror at the thought of having to return the 40 miles back to Camp no. XLIV. alone, on foot, and unarmed. He begged and prayed that he might go with us, and promised that he would keep better watch in future. Then, finding me inflexible, he asked that he might have the revolver; but our midnight adventure had convinced me that it was not advisable to travel in that region without weapons.

I hurriedly scribbled a note to Sirkin on a leaf which I tore out of my diary, telling him what had happened, and enjoining him to keep a vigilant look-out. Robbers were prowling about the neighbourhood, and as they were apparently well informed as to our circumstances, he would have to maintain the strictest watch both day and night, and take particular good care that the caravan animals were not stolen away from him. And, in conclusion, I ordered him to let Cherdon, Li Loyeh, and one other man pursue the thieves, but not to waste more than a week over it. All other information he would be able to obtain from Ördek, who would show them where to pick up the trail. Ördek stuffed the letter into his girdle, and was given a box of matches, so that he might light a fire when he stopped for the night. When he parted from us he looked like a condemned criminal setting out on his last dread procession to the scaffold. But no sooner were we mounted than we saw him stealing along at a half-trot along the lake-side. He thought, I suppose, that it would rain robbers all day, and any moment a bullet might come whistling through the air and pierce him to the heart.

Later on, when our Lassa expedition was ended, he told me how he got on on his way back. All that day, the 29th of July, he did not stop a single moment; nor did he dare to follow our trail in the open, but stole along like a wild cat, through the ravines and watercourses, no matter how they winded and doubled. All day he kept longing intensely for night; but when night came, and the rain poured down in torrents, he was afraid of the darkness, and thought every moment he would be set upon by cut-throats. Two or three times he was nearly frightened out of his wits by kulans peacefully grazing. Then he would stop and crouch down, and roll himself into a ball like a hedgehog, and lie breathlessly still for a time. At last, however, in the pitch-dark night, he came to the throat of the valley where the camp was, and after that he literally ran. The river beside him rumbled in its deep bed, completely

Shagdur, the Author, and Shereb Lama in Pilgrim Attire.

drowning all other sounds. All the way he kept thinking he heard somebody pattering behind him. Every stone hid a lurking miscreant aiming at his heart. How in the darkness and the rain he managed to find his way down the steep slope he did not know. He just kept hurrying on, stumbling, falling, picking himself up again, and time after time forded the river, getting wet to the waist.

Even then his troubles were not ended, for upon approaching the camp, he was as near as possible shot by the sentry, who gave the alarm. But, luckily, Ördek called out to him, and the sentry recognised his voice. The other men came out and crowded round him in amazement, overwhelming him with questions. But for a long time Ördek was not able to answer them; he was so utterly overcome with fatigue, and dropped breathless, like a wet rag. He had never touched the piece of bread he took with him, nor did his appetite come back until after he had slept through the whole of the following day.

Ördek's story and my letter naturally aroused the fears of the men in camp, and caused them to dread the worst, seeing that only the second night out we had thus been exposed to attack. The incident, however, produced one good result. The men were henceforward always on the alert, and had any robbers been so ill-advised as to think of paying them a visit during the night, they would have met with a very warm reception.

Early the next morning Cherdon got ready to start. He took with him Turdu Bai and Li Loyeh; poor Ördek was not in a condition to go. In spite of the rain, our trail was distinctly visible the whole of the way, and they also managed to hit upon the robbers' trail. About 20 or 25 miles from our camp the latter had stopped early in the morning, and there been joined by several other men, accompanied by 15 yaks. After that they took to the water, and rode such a long way on gravelly ground and in the streams that Cherdon and his companions never succeeded in picking up the trail again.

CHAPTER XIX.

A WET NIGHT-WATCH.

BUT to return to our pilgrimage. After Ördek left us, we steered our course south-east and east-south-east, and travelled close upon 24 miles. The mules could easily have done more, but we had to think of the horses. On the shores of a sheet of water, close beside the spot where we encamped, we observed indications of sheep having grazed at a comparatively recent date. Thence we struck up a broad valley, where there was an abundance of pasture. A little distance away, in a notch in the hills, on the right, were about 200 yaks. We stopped, and through the telescope looked about for the herdsmen, for the animals appeared to be tame. But when we approached nearer, the yaks took to flight. Now, wild yaks are never found very near to human dwellings; accordingly we might count upon having another two days before we came into contact with the Tibetan nomads.

All the glens and watercourses seemed to converge towards the south-west, where, no doubt, there was a lake. Kulans and antelopes were very numerous. But throughout the march the landscape did not vary—an open expanse, bordered on the south by low mountains. We halted beside a little brook, and as there were now only three of us, I gave a hand with the unloading and putting up of the tent, and, in fact, did anything there was to do. Whilst Shagdur and the Lama looked after the animals, and hoppled them, I gathered dry yak droppings in the skirt of my voluminous Mongol coat—and found it a very interesting occupation. When I had done, the other two pilgrims congratulated me upon the big heap I had managed to get together in such a short time.

It was now no longer "Vasheh Prevoshoditelstvo," for I had strictly forbidden Shagdur and the Lama to show me any outward tokens of respect; on the contrary, they were to treat me as if I were their groom. Shagdur was to pose as the leader of the

An Encampment of the Three Pilgrims

party, and when we camped it was his duty to issue all commands. Speaking Russian was strictly tabooed; nothing but Mongolian issued from our lips. Shagdur played his part splendidly, and I think I may say I acted mine not amiss. At first my good Cossack was reluctant to issue orders to me; but eventually his scruples sat very lightly upon him. As for our Lama, he had no need to personate any character at all; he had simply to be what he actually was—a Lamaist Lama. Mine was the hardest task, seeing that I had to perform two rôles at one and the same time—first that of a Mongol, secondly that of a menial. After having so honourably done my duty as collector of fuel, I had my dinner, drank my tea, smoked my pipe, and lay down and slept like a log until eight o'clock. When I awoke I was alone; the other two men were driving in the animals for the night. But both Shagdur and the Lama were less cheerful than usual. Whilst I was asleep they had seen three Tibetans, who came over a pass in the east, and rode past our camp towards the north-west. Once they had stopped as if to confer together, after which they turned towards our camp; but eventually they disappeared behind a hill, and were not seen again. Their conduct was highly suspicious; they were no doubt waiting for the night. We were now convinced that we were dogged by spies, and that mounted scouts continually patrolled the line of our march. But whether the men whom Shagdur had just seen were acting on their own initiative or by the command of others, we, of course, did not know.

At half-past eight we picketed the animals to a rope stretched between two pegs. The plan on which we arranged our camp that night was the plan we observed throughout. As night-attacks would almost certainly be made against the wind, especially seeing that we had dogs with us, we placed the tent so as to have its one opening on the side that was sheltered from the wind, and the animals were picketed some five or six feet in front of it. As soon as it grew dark, we let the fire die down, and brought in the boxes, cooking utensils, saddles, &c., which lay outside. On the other side of the horses and mules we chained the big black dog, Yollbars; while Malenki, a big black and white savage beast, was fastened on the other side of the tent, a little distance away.

We divided the night into three watches of three hours each —9 to 12, 12 to 3, 3 to 6, and as a rule I took the first, and the Lama the last. Consequently I was the first to go on night-duty;

and this night, at any rate, I experienced no difficulty whatever in keeping awake. For one thing I had already had a good sleep, and in the next place I was kept on the tenter-hooks in momentary expectation of an attack. The other two were fast asleep and snoring before nine; they were both tired after the excitement of the previous night. I began my vigil, backwards and forwards, backwards and forwards, sometimes close to the tent, sometimes further away. Never shall I forget the numberless heavy footsteps I took hour after hour between Malenki and Yollbars. The minutes crawled. I counted the turns I took—5, 10, 15, 20—and that only took ten or twelve minutes. Oh, those weary, weary nights! Then I sat down and played with Yollbars, who barked and jumped with joy when I patted him. Then I stopped and stroked the horses, and after them the mules. Then I went and cheered up Malenki a bit. Then I—but why enumerate the tiresome devices I successively adopted for killing time?

The morning had been warm, and at intervals copious showers fell, but the afternoon had been tolerably fair. At 9.30, however, a furious tempest came on. The sky turned as black as ink, the lightning flashed from behind the clouds, and the thunder rolled and rumbled amongst the mountains and over our lonely camp with demoniacal fierceness. The worst of all was the rain; it came down like a deluge. I have never seen it rain faster. It lashed the tent and rattled against the canvas as if it would rend it to pieces, while the tent inside was filled with a fine spray like that from an *eau-de-cologne* bottle, wetting everything. But the sleeping men paid no heed to either dampness or rain; they only pulled their coats up a bit higher, and went on driving their pigs to market for all they were worth. Outside the big splashing raindrops played a loud but merry and musical tune on the Mongolian saucepans and saucepan-lids, which were still standing beside the fire.

For some time I continued my slippery promenade, backwards and forwards, between the dogs, until, feeling at length as wet as a drowned cat, I took shelter inside the tent. The moon was now of little use, for the clouds were wedged together in a compact mass, and the rain came down as if it never meant to stop. However, it was not absolutely dark; the moon did shed a faint, diffused light, just sufficient to show the shadows of the caravan animals, a trifle darker than the background of the night behind them, so that I was able to keep an eye upon, at any rate, their numbers.

Then, lighting my pipe and setting up a candle-end behind the lid of a small box, I jotted down my reflections on the joys and beauties of the night! One sentence, and then a turn round the camp; then back again to the light; another sentence, and another round! The rain drip, dripped off my coat-sleeves, my cap was glued to my bald head as if the two had been cast together in one piece, while my artistic countenance, after these repeated drenchings, bore a close resemblance to a zebra's skin. The temperature did not fall below 4°.0 C., or 39°.2 Fahr., so we had no ground to complain of the cold. The rain continued to stream down without intermission; its monotonous patter-patter drowned all other sounds. But, hark! what was that? A plaintive cry in the distance! Were the Tibetans going to set up the same hyæna concert that the Tanguts did at Karasharuin-kubb (Khara-nor) in 1896? No, it was only Yollbars expressing his disgust at having to lie out in the persistent rain. Another alarm! What was *it?* Nothing more than a distant roll of thunder. And time after time was I thus deceived by the thunder and the rain, and time after time I rushed out, with my revolver cocked under my cape, and stood and listened intently through the falling rain. Then, when all was quiet again, I returned to my candle-end. It was perfectly wretched, especially when my pipe refused to burn; it too had caught the prevailing fashion, and, like everything else, was wet.

Although the rain did not abate, the pigs began to want less forcible driving. We shall have a glorious ride to-morrow! I thought to myself. The monotonous breathing of the mules began to make me feel drowsy, and my eyelids grew heavy; but I never forgot myself for more than five minutes together. Had I failed in my watch I should have been overwhelmed with shame, and should have despised myself.

Every now and again, when the rain tickled them, the animals whipped their flanks with their tails, and occasionally the dogs growled softly. Every time they did so I at once jumped up and took a turn round the camp. At 11.30 I went out, firmly resolved not to come back again until my time was up; and I stayed out until well over 12. Shagdur slept so soundly that I hadn't the heart to wake him, and had just persuaded myself to let him have an extra half-hour, when all of a sudden both the dogs began to bark furiously. The Lama awoke and hurried out with his rifle. I cocked my revolver. We put out the light. We stole round the mules in the direction where we suspected the

danger to lie. There we distinctly heard the tramp of horses; the Lama even declared he heard the barking of a dog in another direction. He was just going to fire, but I stopped him. I was determined I would not be the first to begin hostilities; but if the Tibetans made an attack upon us—well, that would be quite another kettle of fish.

That there were horsemen within a few hundred yards of us could no longer admit of a moment's doubt. Leaving the Lama beside the tent, I awoke Shagdur, and we both proceeded down the wind, quietly, cautiously, listening every few paces. Then we distinctly heard a horse departing. After that everything was quiet, and the dogs gradually settled down.

Now it was Shagdur's turn. I heard him splashing through the slush as I crept into my damp sheep-skin. Nights like this are more exciting than instructive—more interesting to read about than to experience. "But you will soon get used to it," I thought to myself, and I very quickly dropped off, and slept well and soundly.

Our Lama, who had had the last watch, came and called us at five o'clock; he thought riding would be preferable to sitting still and indulging in matutinal *dolce far niente* amid such surroundings. I cannot say that we felt particularly brisk or lively after the novel experiences of the night. The air was raw and damp, and we were wet and chilly, and everything smelt sour and nasty. But then it all formed part of the piece; it was the little touches like these that impressed us with the reality of the thing. Nobody had ever heard speak of Lassa pilgrims who were exactly what you might call "Scented darlings!" For my own part, I began to think we were getting along swimmingly. In situations like ours, impressions are apt to be a good deal influenced by the sun. You have a burning desire to see where you are going to, and what your surroundings are like. The night, with its deceitful shadows, is obnoxious even to those who have not the slightest fear of the darkness.

When I started on this crazy expedition my Mussulmans evidently considered that I had somehow, somewhere dropped a goodly portion of the common sense with which Mother Nature had endowed me. And truly it *was* a crazy project, I will admit, to risk so much, my life included, merely for the pleasure of seeing Lassa, a city which, thanks to the descriptions of Indian Pundits and Buriats, their maps and photographs, is far better known, both in respect of its topography and its appear-

ance, than most other towns in Central Asia. But, after two years of quiet, peaceful rambling through the uninhabited parts of the continent, and after my long stretch of strenuous labour, I will honestly confess that I felt an irresistible longing for an adventure which should have a genuine spice of danger in it. I was fascinated by the idea of getting myself involved in difficulties which it would tax all the powers of manhood in me to get out of again with a whole skin; in fact, I wanted to have a good tough tussle with fate. I wanted to pit my alertness, my courage, my resourcefulness, and my resolution against the strong hand of destiny. In a word, it was adventures I sought for, far more than I sought to get to Lassa. My friend the Lama had described the holy city to me so thoroughly that I was almost sick of it. I wanted to see the Tibetans—I wanted to talk to them—I wanted to get to the bottom of their rooted detestation of Europeans. A few years ago an uncritical young man astonished us with tales of his having been tortured in Tibet; but I was in no degree deterred by his sensational stories —for the simple reason that I did not believe them. It would be a gain for everybody concerned if people who find it difficult to stick to the plain truth would leave the writing of books alone.

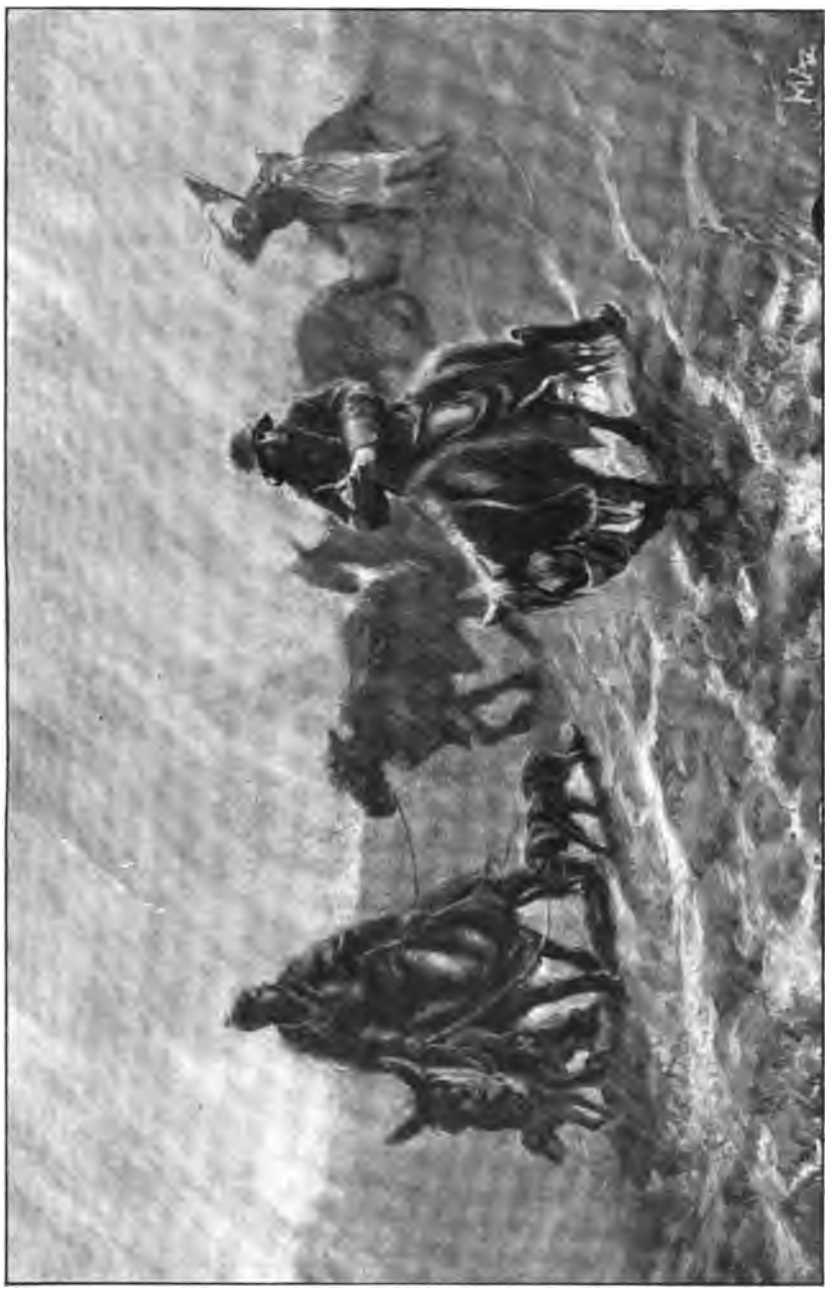
As you might expect, none of us had a very good appetite that morning, especially as it consisted of nothing better than bread and tea. But after our pipes were lit, and we were well started in the saddle, the day passed in the usual manner. However, it was rather trying to my patience to plot the route from the back of a beast that moved like an antiquated family-coach. The day was as dull and gloomy as the night had been, without a glimpse of sunshine. The skirts of the heavy black clouds hung so low down that we kept expecting to see them burst—crash!—upon the earth. The downpour, however, turned out, when it did come, to be less formidable than we had expected—only a little occasional splatter of rain, with a determined hail-squall between, whilst we were crossing the mountains on the south.

During the course of the morning the Lama announced that he saw a black tent away in the south-east, and wanted to go to it to gather information; but I preferred to keep on. Upon entering the glen which led up into the mountains, the ascent increased rapidly, until it soon became a stiff climb. Quitting the brook which trickled down it, we rode zigzag up the hills of red, disintegrated sandstone. In two or three places we

observed camping-grounds which had been recently used, and there was a cairn on the summit of the pass. Over on the other side we went down by a very steep declivity into a broad glen leading to the south-east. A little way down, in an expansion of the glen, we came across the dead body of a sheep, with its load on its back, consisting of salt packed in a two-ended sack. It had evidently been left behind by a Tibetan sheep-caravan, which had been up to the small lakes where our robber friends had paid their respects to us, to fetch salt, which, as I have already said, lay thickly around some of them. We had, indeed, observed traces of sheep in the locality. As we advanced the deserted camp-fires became more and more frequent, as well as the bones of the animals upon which the Tibetans had dined. Moreover, a herd of yaks had recently travelled up one of the side-glens we passed.

Upon reaching a point where our glen swung away to the south-west, we turned our backs upon it, and struck up into the next mountain-range. Here Shagdur soon hit upon a frequented track, and from the top of the pass to which it led us, we again commanded a wide prospect to the south, though it was not a very encouraging one—being merely an endless succession of mountains and mountain ranges as far as the eye could reach. Not a man, not a black tent, not a herd or a flock within sight. A little longer, then, we were to be still free from inquisitive glances; though all the time we had a presentiment that hidden spies were dogging our footsteps, and never lost sight of us. The sky was gloomy and heavy as lead, and the hours crawled wearisomely past. Day though it was, we were still on the stretch. We knew nothing whatever about the country we were traversing, we knew nothing whatever about its circumstances or its people. Yet we were convinced that, sooner or later, the unexpected would happen. Never for one moment durst we relax our vigilance; a critical moment might come when we least of all expected it. From the pass we again followed a path which was perfectly distinct, and evidently much used, until we reached a valley that abounded in marshes, pools, natural springs, brooks, and rivulets, with luxuriant grass. The yak-dung had been turned over to dry, so that whoever did it meant to come back again. And there were signs of nomad camps in every direction.

As the grass seemed to thin out further on, and there happened to be a suitable position from the strategic point of view



In the Pouring Rain and Mire.

inexorable: "Mount at daybreak." And so away we posted to the south-east across a difficult and heavily rolling country. There was not now a single dry rag throughout the whole of our little caravan; the rain could not make us any wetter. But, oh! we did long for just a little sunshine to come and dry us. Yet we never saw anything of it that day; the grey and lowering clouds never lifted, though they did distinguish themselves by an extraordinary generosity. When I got into my soft saddle, the water squelched out of it, and my boots were soon so full that every time I moved them, the water inside swished backwards and forwards. When I lifted my arm, it was like wringing out a wet clout. Wretchedness, thy name is Rain in Tibet! Oh, if only it had snowed instead!

The route we were following plainly led, we now saw, to Lassa. After crossing five passes, the trail joined another which came from the west, and was freshly trampled by a big herd of yaks; and as the heavy rain soon blotted out all animals' footsteps, we concluded that the herd in question must have passed quite recently—maybe that very morning. If we made haste, we might possibly overtake the caravan.

CHAPTER XX.

FIRST MEETING WITH THE NOMADS.

BEFORE we got very much further, we saw, away in the far distance, a number of black dots: they were yaks. A little while after that a flock of sheep loomed up out of the semi-darkness; then a tent, which had hitherto been masked, came into view on the edge of a brook. Whilst I and Shagdur continued our journey, the Lama rode across to the tent to see what he could make of its inmates. We assumed, of course, that they were Mongol pilgrims, and thought that we might perhaps travel in company with them. But they turned out to be Tanguts, making a pilgrimage from the temple of Kum-bum, in north-west China. They were travelling very slowly, resting one or two days at every camp, and considered that it would take them still a fortnight to reach Lassa. They manifested a far too lively interest in us, and pumped us about everything—who we were, how many we were, where we came from, where we were going to, and so on, and so on. They had 50 yaks with them, two horses, and three dogs; but these last quickly repented their desire for a nearer acquaintance with Yollbars and Malenki.

The flock of sheep consisted of no less than 700, and were only guarded by an old woman, who, however, was apparently quite accustomed to pilgrims, for she exhibited not the least fear of us. She might very well have done so, for after all the rain and mud and mire we looked little better than tramps. The worst knights of the road would have had no cause to blush for us, for the very last traces of refinement in our appearance had been punctiliously but thoroughly washed away. The old woman told us that in the next glen we should find a black tent, where we could obtain everything we wanted, above all, information about the road to Lassa.

And, sure enough, we found the tent in the spot she indicated, and encamped about three-quarters of a mile from it,

choosing, for safety's sake, an open situation. The Lama at once went to the people in the tent, and returned well satisfied with his visit. The tent, which he found guarded by dogs, was inhabited by a young man and two women, who, however, refused to sell us either sheep, or milk, or fat, or tsamba, on the ground that it was a sacred day. If, however, we would wait patiently until the morrow, we might have everything we wanted; but, seeing that we were peaceful Mongols, they gave him there and then some dry argol, or yak-dung. The Lama brought a bagful of it with him; and it was a good thing he did, for our own supply was so wet that we should hardly have been able to make a fire without it. In reply to his question, as to whether they would sell us two or three horses, the people answered that that rested with the master of the encampment, and he was just then absent from home.

Scarcely had the Lama finished his story, when the man in question appeared on a hill-side not very far away. As soon as he saw us, he stopped and scrutinized us closely. The Lama, however, went and invited him to our tent, and he came without ceremony, showing no fear whatever, and squatted down on the wet ground just opposite the tent-opening. Sampo Singhi, for that was his name, was a man probably about forty years old; his face black rather than sunburnt, beardless, and wrinkled; his dirty hair as black as a raven's wing, and the rain trickled off it down upon the ragged sack-like cloak he wore; boots of coarse felt, which had originally been white; pipe and tobacco-pouch hung from his girdle; everything from top to toe unspeakably filthy—such was the appearance of the first Tibetan we came into contact with. He was bare-headed and bare-legged, except for his boots—in other words, he was minus inexpressibles. It must have been pretty cool, riding about in those rains clad in such primitive attire.

He kept blowing his nose incessantly with his fingers, and with an amazing display of energy; and we, for safety's sake, did the same, for we did not know but that these demonstrative acts of politeness were imperatively demanded by Tibetan etiquette when you met a stranger. The picture we made in that streaming rain was one which would have rejoiced the hearts of the gods. Pity there were none to see us!

Sampo Singhi pried, without the slightest shyness or compunction, into all our belongings; so that it was a good thing I stuffed away my instruments and diary before he came. He was

A Young Tibetan Shepherd.

particularly pleased with our tubs, which were narrow at the top and broadened out towards the bottom. He remarked, with the air of a connoisseur, that the Mongols always had tubs like those. Of me he manifested not the slightest suspicion; but then I was nearly as dirty as he was. The acquaintance

An Older Tibetan.

made, and confidence established, our Lama succeeded in squeezing out of Sampo Singhi the information that the site of our camp of the previous day, between the two small lakes, was called Merik; and a river which we had seen that day in the east was called Garchu-sänghi. The spot at which we were then encamped was called Gom-jima, and the nearest mountain-range in the south-east, Haramuk-lurumak. He told us also

that for two days more we should hardly be likely to meet many nomads, but on the third day their tents would be numerous. If we travelled by short, slow stages it would take us twelve days to reach Lassa; but if we travelled at the rate we had done that day—we did very nearly 26¼ miles—we should reach the city in eight days. Yes, he said, the road we were following led right enough to the pass of Lani-la.

Shagdur and the Lama were both snuff-takers, and Sampo Singhi was induced to take a good strong pinch. But he ought not to have done it; it was naughty of him. He began to sneeze, and sneezed and sneezed as though he never meant to stop. Nor was he the least bit put out when we laughed at him. He asked, quite innocently, whether we were accustomed to put pepper in our snuff; but he was not to be tempted to indulge in a second pinch.

Suddenly bethinking him of the responsibilities of his position, Shagdur roared out at me: "Boy, don't sit there with your mouth open. Go and fetch in the horses." We did not know whether Sampo Singhi understood Mongolian or not; but, at all events, he manifested not the slightest astonishment when I jumped to my feet, ran up the hill-side, and began to drive the animals towards our tent. Fortunately he took his departure before I had been at it very long, otherwise he had sense enough to have asked himself, what does that fellow know about mules? For no sooner did I get them all together, than Sarik Kullak, or "yellow-ears," took it into his head to gallop back to the abundant pasture from which I had fetched him. I followed him, and brought him back; but when we got to the spot where I had left the other mules, behold! they were gone. The mules were masters of the situation. Finally, I managed to catch three of them, and took care to keep fast hold until I had them safe on the picketing line.

In the evening the sun, when setting, condescended to honour us with a parting glance from underneath the heavy masses of cloud, and about nine o'clock the moon peeped out for a few short minutes. But soon after ten the wind got up in the west, and I had to turn my attention to the tent. A little later on the rain began to stream down again, steadily, resolutely, persistently. It was as much as ever I could do to see the animals. That night, however, we were a good deal easier in our minds. Since our unexpected meeting with the yak-hunters, we had not come across any of the natives, although we felt that they

were hovering about our path like evil spirits, and once had even caught us napping. Now, however, we had the peaceful nomads for our nearest neighbours; besides, Sampo Singhi assured us that there were no robbers in that part of the country. But for all that we did not relax our vigilance one whit; the only difference was that I now ventured to light the brazier inside the tent. It made our already abominably dirty dwelling still more dirty by adding soot to the mud.

On the 1st of August I was awakened with the words: "Three Tibetans are coming to see us!" I made haste to get up and hide away any little articles that lay about and might have betrayed the presence of a mysterious stranger. The approaching visitors were two men and a woman, and their errand, it was evident even at a distance, could only be a peaceful one, for they were leading a sheep behind them, and carried several things in their hands. Sampo Singhi was again the principal spokesman, as he arranged his various delicacies round our fire. "Beautiful things—beautiful things!" he exclaimed. After our scanty fare of the last few days, we should feed like princes! He had brought us a big piece of *mar* (fat), a bowl of *sho* (sour milk), a dish of *chorá* (powdered cheese), a can of *oma* (fresh milk), and some *bema* (clotted cream). What more could we wish for? And, truth to say, they were all first-rate except the cream, which was very little different from a packet of hairy, sooty pieces of skin, squeezed tight together. Powdered cheese is one of the main ingredients in tsamba, the others being flour, tea, and lumps of fat or butter—all mixed in the proper proportions, and stirred together in one dish. I must confess I never succeeded in cultivating a thorough liking for this delicacy, though the Mongols set such immense store by it. On the other hand, I cannot speak too highly of the sour milk. It surpassed all my previous conceptions in that line; and when it was all done, had some Fortunatus come to me and offered me a choice amongst all the delicacies of the earth, without hesitation I should have chosen just another bowl of sour milk. It was thick, and white, and tart. Tibetan *sho* is unsurpassed by anything of the kind in the world!

But the time came to pay for these fine things, and Shagdur drew forth a few pieces of Chinese silver. Sampo Singhi took them and weighed them, and pronounced them beautiful, but declared that he never accepted anything but silver struck at Lassa. As we had no such money, we tried him with blue

Chinese cloth, and that bait took. Sampo Singhi stroked it tenderly, passed it through his fingers, examined it closely, studied its effect at arm's-length—in a word, he was enraptured with it. His noble spouse's little eyes were alight with covetousness. We had brought with us two bundles of this cloth expressly for purposes of barter, and Sampo Singhi complacently assured us he would be satisfied with one of these. Then began the usual Asiatic higgling and bargaining, which resulted in Sampo Singhi finally contenting himself with a third of a bundle—9⅓ yards. But no matter how we tempted him, he would not part with any horses. When this important business was settled, each party congratulated themselves that they had got the better of the other!

At my suggestion our Lama then asked Sampo Singhi to kill the sheep, and cut it up; he might then, as a reward for the hospitality and friendliness he had shown us, keep the skin for himself. He was delighted with the suggestion. With carefully veiled indifference, I watched how he set about it. Flinging the animal on its left side, he tied together three of its feet, leaving the left fore-foot free; then he wound a thin soft leather strap several times round its nose, pulling it tight; next, placing the animal's head in such a position that its two horizontal cork-screw-like horns touched the ground, he put his feet on them. The sheep lay motionless as if in a vice. Then Sampo Singhi stuck the thumb and fore-finger of his right hand into his victim's nostrils, his object being to kill it by suffocation. I took a stealthy peep at my watch to see how many minutes it would take, though I afterwards forgot to note down the time; but I do remember that it took a good many minutes, and that I suffered unspeakably, as I witnessed the poor animal kicking and struggling in the convulsions of death. The whole time the old man kept repeating at a desperate rate: "On maneh padmeh hum." It put me in mind of the Mussulmans' method of killing sheep, for they also, whilst reddening the knife-blade with innocent blood, as if at one and the same time to quiet their own consciences and flatter their Creator, generally gabble a string of prayers in praise of the Almighty!

At last, however, the sheep ceased to struggle; its legs relaxed, and Sampo Singhi got up. It was hard to witness this cruelty without taking steps to stop it. However, I dare not betray my feelings; besides, it would have profited little to interfere with time-honoured customs. After that we break-

fasted together on the milk foods which we had bought, and I let the dogs stuff themselves with meat, as a reward for their faithful services at night. As for Madame Sampo Singhi, she was so enraptured with her piece of cloth, that she quite lost her appetite, and could do nothing but nod good-naturedly first to one of us and then to another, time and time again. She was dressed in a similar manner to her lord and master, except that her coarse black hair was gathered into two long plaits hanging down her back, though for the most part it stuck out like rats'

A Tibetan Woman.

tails in every direction all over her head. How on earth she contrived to get so amazingly dirty as she was, I could not for the life of me understand; but oh, how I *did* envy her! I suppose my skin was of finer texture—at any rate, the rain persisted in washing it "clean." But upon that good lady's cheeks the filth was plastered so thick and firm that she might have forced potatoes in it with every prospect of success. I imagine the pores of a Tibetan's skin are atrophied—at all events, they never can discharge their proper functions rightly.

When we started again Sampo Singhi good-naturedly helped us to load up; and our tent, after all the rain it had

absorbed, was twice its ordinary weight. The honest nomad wished us a successful journey and a pleasant visit to Lassa, and did it, our Lama said, in such courteous terms, as showed that he was no stranger to the elegancies of Lamaist manners. Evidently he had no desire to detain us; otherwise he would have given us some warning of what we should have to face before the day was over. He simply said, however, that we should have to cross a pass, and that the road to Lassa was everywhere quite easy to follow, and that was all. We promised to look him up when we returned, and did so, but failed to see him, as he had moved his household Penates to fresh pastures green.

When we started, about nine o'clock, the clouds lowered heavy as lead over the earth, boding nothing good, and it was only half light. On the other side of the hills and knobby mountains we struck the river Garchu-sänghi, which on a closer inspection of it looked anything but inviting. As we proceeded, its glen narrowed rapidly, and the dense masses of water rolled along with a hollow rumble between their containing cliffs. The path was in places very difficult, crossing over the shoulders of the crags by dangerous pathways. Here marmots and hares were particularly numerous, and our dogs put themselves to a vast amount of unnecessary trouble in their passion for disturbing them. Five minutes after we left Gom-jima, the inevitable rain begun again, and we were very soon wet through. It would soon be a novel experience to feel dry. The ground was simply one illimitable morass. Our animals splashed and squelched and plumped their way through the slush. Over a final pass and down a steep slope, and the country once more opened out; for as far as the rain would permit us to see there were no mountains in the south. But leaving the Garchu-sänghi on our left, we soon turned south-east, taking precious good care not to wander off the track into the deep, tenacious mud. After proceeding a good distance in this new direction, we found ourselves moving straight down upon the right bank of a river, so big and so broad that at first we took it for a lake, especially as the rain prevented us from seeing the opposite bank. But above the sharp splashing of the rain-drops on its surface we soon detected a hollow, rumbling roar, as of a vast flood in movement. The yellow muddy colour of the water also told us plainly that it was a river; and as we stood on the brink, and saw it rolling its overwhelming masses west-south-west, we realized

that our fate was sealed. There was no other way except to ford it.

It was, in short, no other than the Sachu-sangpo, which had been previously crossed in this neighbourhood by M. Bonvalot, Prince Henri d'Orléans, and Mr. Rockhill; but in consequence of the enormous rainfall it had swollen amazingly, and was divided into at least a score of arms, each of them big enough to make a respectable river. Four of these were, indeed, so formidable that I thought it would be almost impossible to ford them. Without a moment's hesitation and without making the least examination of the ford, our Lama, who always led the way, rode straight into the water, and we of course followed obediently in his footsteps. However, everything went off all right—for a time. The river was not more than three feet deep, except in one or two places, though every moment I kept expecting to see the Lama, who rode the smallest mule, disappear amid the turbid flood. After scrambling about half-way over, we stopped to rest a minute or two on a mud-bank, where the current flowed more gently and was barely a foot deep. Up to this point I had been in a state of great anxiety, but now felt considerably relieved. My self-congratulation was, however, of a precarious character. We had half the river behind us, it is true, but the other half was still before us, and there we were, in the middle of that vast, roaring, racing, foaming flood, rolling down its immense volumes upon us as if it meant to sweep us away like straws. With these broad expanses of water moving swiftly past on both sides of us, it was not at all easy to keep one's head and ward off giddiness.

The Lama, digging his heels into his mule, once more plunged into the boiling current. Ten paces and the animal was immersed to his tail. Up went the rider's knees, to keep the water out of his boots. Almost at the same instant the mule which carried our two skin-covered boxes was in difficulties. The boxes, being watertight, lifted her off her feet, and the current, swinging her half-round, carried her with it. She was, of course, drawn by the suction into the swiftest part of the current, till nothing of her was visible except her head and the two boxes. I gave her up for lost. But in some extraordinary manner she contrived to get her footing again. By that time she was quite close to the left bank, up which she managed to scramble unaided, although she was a very long way down stream.

As soon as we saw what had happened to the mule, Shagdur

and I shouted frantically to the Lama to turn back; but he did not hear us. The river churned and foamed around him as if he were a paddle-wheel. He merely hoisted his knees higher up on his saddle, and patted his mule as she sank deeper and deeper into the water. I can only say that the contempt of danger which on this occasion he displayed was nothing short of heroic; for you must remember he was dressed, as indeed we all were, in a big, heavy sheepskin, saturated with rain, and was, besides, unable to swim. For my own part, I had fastened up my coat and loosened my girdle, so as to be ready to fling them off at a moment's notice. Although I by no means wanted a bath—that is to say, deliberately wished for one—I was fully prepared for a dip, for in that incessant rain we got stiff and spiritless, and the weather was much too cool to tempt one to take a bath, especially now, when everything in the nature of personal cleanliness was so diametrically at variance with our Mongolian principles.

But fortune favours the brave, and we very soon saw our Lama's mule beginning to rise out of the water, and the young man soon after dropped his feet into the stirrups. For us, with our bigger horses, the passage was not so dangerous.

The Sachu-sangpo, however, as if in revenge for our audacity, was resolved not to let me off without a wetting. "If you dare try," it said, "to penetrate to the holy of holies of Tibet, you shall at least have reason to remember your insolence in defying the hindrance which I put in your way." The last of the arms, one of the four biggest, although not more than 100 feet across, was deep and very swift. The Lama and Shagdur were already safely across, for I was lingering behind. Without noticing which way they had gone, I struck straight across towards the spot where I saw them standing. My horse sank in up to the flanks. Higher and higher rose the water. Ugh! here it was, pouring into my boots! Now it was over my knees. Now it was at the top of my saddle. Very soon there was nothing left above water but the horse's head and neck. The Lama and Shagdur screamed themselves purple trying to make me understand which way the ford ran. But not a sound did I hear owing to the roaring of the river. Now it was up to my waist. I was just going to slip off my horse when his feet went from under him, and he began to swim. Instinctively I laid hold of his mane; as it turned out, it was the very best thing I could have done; for he soon touched bottom again, and, making a

desperate effort, succeeded in scrambling up the steep bank, the water pouring like a tide off both horse and rider. I had had my bath, a thorough one and no mistake. But the strain made me shaky in the knees for a long time afterwards.

This wetting made, it is true, very little difference to us, for we were all thoroughly drenched to the skin already by the rain; yet somehow rain is preferable to being dipped bodily with your clothes on into a running river. All our belongings —tent, boxes, clothing, food—were in the same condition. After this adventure our little party, standing on the bank, cut a sorrier figure than ever. Still, it was a good thing to be safe on the other side of the river. Nobody could tell how long this ever-blessed rain would continue, and until it stopped the river would certainly not fall. It had taken us twenty-six minutes to cross from one side to the other; but then we had forded the stream slowly, and portions of the river-bed, between the arms, were not covered with water. As I counted them, my horse took 716 steps in those parts of the river only which were actually under water; in other words, the stream, if continuous in breadth, would have been close upon 550 yards wide. To calculate the volume of a river so split up as this was, and under such circumstances as those we crossed it in, was not to be thought of. I should, however, estimate it approximately at 8,000 or 9,000 cubic feet in the second. It is only in the rainy season, and then not very often, that the Sachu-sangpo attains such enormous dimensions. Anyway it is one of the largest rivers in the interior of Tibet. I am not, of course, speaking of those which find an outlet to the ocean, but only of those which have the whole of their course from source to mouth within the country itself. At a later period we were again destined to form a close acquaintance with this river, namely, in the lowest part of its course.

The valley through which it flowed stretched 85° west of south, but was soon lost to view in the blur of the rain. Grey, chill, dreary—such was the landscape that faced us when we turned our dripping backs upon the Sachu-sangpo. My boots were now painfully watertight—until it occurred to me that there was really no need for me to haul along with me the great weight they contained. This was not, indeed, the first time that I had carried water in my boots. One previous occasion was in the Desert of Takla-makan in 1895; but then it was to save a man's life. Now, however, nobody's life was at stake, and

we certainly could not complain of want of water. I stopped and emptied my boots, and then hung them on the saddle behind me, and rode barefoot. The boxes were less tenacious reservoirs ; the water was already dripping out of them, and went on dripping until we encamped. And this we soon did, for we had all had enough for that day. We found a grassy hill, where the rain had penetrated the ground without converting it into a morass, and there, beside a little brook, we halted. Before dark the brook had swollen out to three times the size of what it was when we arrived, and I drew a sigh of satisfaction as I thought of what the Sachu-sangpo would be like behind us. It would have been utterly impossible to cross it then. I was sure that Sampo Singhi had deliberately abstained from warning us, either lest we should stay too long on his pasture-grounds, or because he did not wish to accompany us and show us the best place for fording the stream. I must simply call the Camp no. L., for I do not know what was the name of the locality. And truly a cheerful camp it was! All our baggage was saturated, and several of our things destroyed. Our Lama was most concerned about his medicine-chest—that is to say, the cloth and paper bags in which he kept his medicaments and other remedies. For a little while we were puzzled how to get a fire. There was plenty of yak dung, but it was so wet it would not burn. But after stripping off the outer wet layers, and wrapping the inner cakes in dry paper, we at last succeeded. Then I took off my clothes and at the risk of scorching them dried them at the anything but odoriferous argol fire.

Pitiless and unemotional, night wrapped her wings about the earth, and the moon was unable to send even one transient gleam to light up the rain-drenched uplands of Tibet. When I began my four hours' wearisome watch, it was chill and gloomy and dark and windy, and it rained as if—as if the sluice-gates of heaven were pulled up and burnt! The tent canvas flapped like a sail in an unsteady wind. I fancied I heard stealthy footsteps approaching. Then it was horsemen charging down at full gallop. Twice during the night, and from different directions, I heard shouts. Perhaps they were the pilgrims from Kumbum ; but, no, surely they would never be so foolish as to try to cross the Sachu-sangpo.

What with watching at night and the stretch we were kept upon all day, the suspense was beginning to play upon our nerves. There was now no longer any secret about our being

on the way. We were already amongst the Tibetans, and each succeeding day brought us nearer to a crisis. We were, it is true, slowly but surely approaching our goal; but we were getting tired—very tired. In fact I almost longed that we might be stopped in some way or other. I would give worlds to sleep my sleep out. On the other hand, I thought that having surmounted two such difficulties as the attack of the robbers and the passage of the Sachu-sangpo, fortune would surely go on and favour us to the end, and permit us to reach Lassa.

That night also one or two of our animals broke loose during my spell of watching. Both my companions were sleeping heavily. Our Lama, strange to say, was now in good heart, and took a cheerful view of our prospects, and yet at first he had not been willing to come with us. Shagdur was calm, but grave. They were both splendid fellows, just the sort of men to have with you in an enterprise like that which I was embarked upon, if it was not to have a disastrous termination. When midnight came, I gave poor Shagdur not one minute's grace. Whilst he, after examining his rifle, crept out into the rain, I crept into my miserable bed. He was too giddy with sleep, I was too drowsy, for us to talk. We changed places without exchanging a word.

CHAPTER XXI.

YAK CARAVANS.

OUR Lama whiled away the tedium of his watch by converting a preserved fruit tin into a lamp, fashioning a wick out of a rope-end, and feeding his lamp with mutton fat. That was the only light we had on the morning of the 2nd of August. During the day a remarkable thing happened: it stopped raining! The sky was, it is true, threatening enough, but it cleared up towards evening. Our poor animals were, however, unable to do more than 15½ miles. Both the horses were completely done up, and two of the mules had sore backs.

We now followed the little brook beside which we had encamped until we came to a small pass. Then, after traversing a chaos of hills, we once more reached open country, and in the far distance, that is, to the south-east, soon perceived a mysterious black patch on the horizon. When we approached nearer to it, it turned out to be a herd of yaks, belonging to a caravan encamped on a hillside immediately overlooking the road. The herd numbered about 300, all pack animals.

The men of the caravan, 25 in number, having no tents, sat round their fires in the open air. Their baggage, which consisted of cube tea, sewed up in sacking, was stacked up in a dozen piles beside them. They were carrying it from Kumbum, in the west of the Chinese province of Kan-su, to Tashilumpo, on the Brahmaputra. They would therefore soon turn off to the right, that is, to the south of the highway to Lassa. They were only travelling by night, halting during the day to let their animals graze. That is unquestionably an excellent plan when you know the way, and are not making maps. A troop of fierce dogs, which came rushing to meet us, were received by Yollbars and Malenki in a fashion which inspired even their owners with respect. We were riding quietly past their stacks of tea, when several of the men came down to the roadside to look at us. Thereupon we stopped. They were all naked to

the waist, their coats being flung back from their brown chests and shoulders, and held in place by the girdle. Their first question was "How many are you?" as though they wanted to know which side would be most likely to win in case of a scrimmage. Then they asked: "Have you anything to sell? Where do you come from? How long have you been on the road? Where are you making for?" And when we told them "Lassa," they thought it a perfectly natural thing that we should do so. All the same, I overheard an old man, as he

A Tibetan Caravan-man.

pointed to me and nudged his neighbour, utter the solitary word, "Peling!" *i.e.*, European!

They were a rough-looking crew, a good deal like robbers. With their dirty-brown complexion, and thick black hair, which was often gathered into two pigtails, they were not unlike North American Indians. One of them understood a little Mongolian and asked good-naturedly, "Ämur sän baneh?" or "How do you do?" Most of them, however, paid not the slightest attention to us, but remained beside their camp-fires, drinking tea

and smoking, as though there was nothing at all uncommon in the sight of pilgrims. The men who interviewed us, however, invited us to stop and encamp beside them; but we were not ambitious for company, and after a few minutes' further conversation we resumed our march.

My horse now so far gave up that he was unable to keep pace with the mules, so that after going about a mile further, we judged it prudent to stop and pitch the tent beside a spring in the open, about a stone's throw south of the road. The latter was now a regular highway, and afforded evidence of a lively traffic.

It was a splendid afternoon; the sun warm—nay, quite hot—and we spread out everything we possessed to dry—clothes, sheep-skins, wraps, rugs, etc.—and a gentle south-west breeze helped the sun. However, not long after this we once more heard the thunder, and in a little it was followed by a fierce squall of hail, and this again was succeeded by a sharp burst of rain; so that we had to bundle our belongings hurriedly together and pitch them helter skelter into the tent. Most of the thunderclaps had a peculiar metallic sound, which died away slowly in the far distance, like the echo of a church bell. I have never heard anything like it before. It was only immediately over our camp that the storm raged; the country all around was bathed in bright sunshine. That evening we sat a long time over our fire, discussing our position, and decided at the first opportunity to exchange our exhausted mules and horses for fresher animals—even yaks would be better than nothing.

During the last few days nothing of a suspicious character had happened in our neighbourhood; but our Lama thought that the yak-hunters would almost certainly send intelligence to the chief of Nakkchu, and in that case he would at once despatch special messengers into every part of his province, with instructions to keep a sharp watch upon the roads that led to Lassa. Once we reached the more inhabited districts, where the people were accustomed to pilgrims, we should be less likely to attract attention. That night we kept careful watch, for the escort of the tea caravan, ten at least of whom carried firearms, had not inspired us with an over-great degree of confidence. Had they chosen to fall upon us in the darkness our position would have been desperate indeed. Although it was urgently desirable that we should push on as fast as possible,

we nevertheless decided to rest the 3rd of August where we were. The locality was called by the Tanguts Amdo-mochu, and they said that for a yak-caravan it was a journey of five days thence to Nakkchu, and seven to the pass of Lani-la.

I was awakened at nine o'clock next morning by my companions, after a thorough good night's rest. They said the tea caravan was approaching, and would be worth looking at; and, in truth, it was an extremely original and picturesque sight. They marched in military order, and in divisions of 30 or 40 yaks each. The animals travelled slowly, with short pottering steps, but kept rank without occasioning much trouble

A Tame Yak, the Animal I Rode from Leh to Kara-korum in 1902.

to the two or three men who were in charge of each detachment. If a yak chanced to stray from the ranks one of the drivers would stretch out his arms towards it, and whistle shrilly, and the beast would at once return to its place. The men urged on their animals with short, shrill, staccato cries. Considering the strength of a yak, their loads were light. All the men travelled on foot, and none of them were in the least degree inquisitive. Although they went close past our tent not one stopped and peeped in; they were too intent upon their business.

Our Lama went and spoke to two or three of them. They said that by way of a change they had rested the past night, and were now marching by day; also that, having reached

a region where the grass was more abundant and of a better quality they could let the yaks graze during the night, particularly as it was moonshine. They again invited us to get ready and accompany them to their next camp. This travelling company from Kum-bum were Tanguts, men of the same race as the Tibetans, and speaking the same language. The entire caravan—the yaks, the men, their clothes, their weapons, their dogs—all were perfectly black, and they were accompanied by black shadows, for the sun now came out. It was like a procession of demons! They were, as I have said, on their way to the holy temple of Tashi-lumpo, and the bazaars of Shigatse, where they would sell their tea.

With the whole day before us we meant to have a thorough good rest. As this was the first real opportunity we had had to get our belongings dry, we spread everything out in the sun on sheepskins and cloaks, and with the thermometer at 14°.6 C. or 58°.3 Fahr. it was appreciably warm. I even took off most of my own clothes, and put them also in the sun. Then we filled our boots with warm, dry sand, so as to make them reassume their proper shape. That day I had the indescribable pleasure of cooking our dinner. After cutting the pieces of meat into thin rashers I roasted them in butter from Sampo Singhi's "farm," and they made a very delicate dish, flavoured as they were with powdered cheese and salt. The sour milk was unfortunately all done, but we had some tea and raisins for dessert. The latter were discovered by our Lama when he was rummaging amongst his precious medicine bags. He had brought them with him all the way from Charkhlik, but had never produced any of them before. The rest of the day I spent basking in the sunshine with my pipe, and a saddle for my pillow. I have seldom felt so indolent as I did on the 3rd August, 1901. Shagdur and the Lama slept most of the time; though we took care to keep our animals within sight all day.

The Lama, with the mien of an artist, painted my head all over down to the roots of my hair, and even inside my ears. For future use he provided me with a little box of brown paint and a small brush, so that when necessary I could, with the help of my bright watch-case, touch up the colouring myself. For I admit it is annoying when you, like a conjuror with his one-two-three! change your skin, to find a pink patch showing, much as if a piece of a ball-beauty's dress were to get pasted on a chimney sweep's nose.

The only language we used was Mongolian; neither I nor Shagdur ever uttered a word of Russian. Before going farther we thought it best to be prepared with the answers we should give in case we should be cross-examined by the Tibetans. Our story was to be that we were all Buriats from Sakhir, and had travelled through the land of the Khalkha Mongols and Tsaidam. Our Lama would on no account allow himself to pass for a Mongol: he was a Buriat, and, lest he should be recognised again by his acquaintances in Lassa, he put on darkened wire spectacles like those I wore, but he intended to keep out of their way as much as possible. The man he was most afraid of was the chief lama of the temple in which he had pursued his studies. If he were recognised he expected the consequences would be serious. The Tibetans would allow us to return, but would detain him, under the pretext that he was a Lassa lama, and would then punish him as a traitor who had showed the spies of the Europeans the way into the forbidden territory. Whether we were resting or whether we were crossing the unknown mountains he gabbled incessantly his prayers to the eternal gods, and argued the point with his conscience again and again.

He took the greatest interest in Christianity, and repeatedly asked me to tell him about my faith. As far as he could see, there were many points of contact between Christianity and Lamaism, and I had quite as good a right as anybody else to make the pilgrimage to Lassa. His knowledge was confined to what he had gleaned from the holy books of Tibet and Mongolia, and seeing me engaged about so many things of which he had never hitherto had the slightest conception, such as investigating the nature of the earth's crust, studying the heavenly bodies, and reading strange books, he came to the conclusion that I was at least as good as a lama, and that the authorities at Lassa ought to thank me if I chose to pay them a visit. The Dalai Lama was omniscient: he knew who we were, and why we were travelling to Lassa; indeed, he knew what we talked about every day. He would see to it that no ill happened to me; but what his attitude would be towards our Lama himself was another and a very different question. If my God was Almighty, would I pray to Him that He would preserve the Lama's life and limbs, for it was solely for my sake that he had embarked upon this perilous adventure. I assured him that he might be perfectly easy. Whatever happened we should all stick together; I would never desert him.

Between sunset and the moment when the moon began her nightly journey through the star-lit vault of heaven there was one hour of intense darkness, so that we were quite relieved when at length she showed her face. I had the first watch—from 8 to 11. It was so peaceful and still, there was not a sound far or near. By way of a change the Lama and Shagdur slept outside the tent. The nearer we came to the scene of danger the calmer I became. It is far easier to be in the midst of peril than to wait for and anticipate its arrival.

Starting again at five o'clock on the morning of the 4th of August, we directed our course to the south-south-east, and traversed a fairly open country, be-ribboned with rocks. Upon reaching a point where the road bifurcated, we stopped in perplexity; but finally decided that the road to the left must lead to Lassa, and the road to the right to Tashi-lumpo. But, after riding about an hour along the former, we found that it swung away sharply to the east, and so concluded that it led to Nakkchu. Accordingly we turned back to the other road, and soon had proof that we were in the right way. For we met a caravan of a hundred yaks, all lightly loaded, and driven by half a dozen armed men on horseback, and they were coming from Lassa. The men wore big tall yellow hats, with wide brims, and had goats and dogs with them; but they seemed afraid of us, and hurried on past us as fast as they could.

Our mules had picked up tremendously after the good grass and the day's rest. But whether it was that they considered the yaks more sociable, or that they thought them comical creatures—anyhow, they turned suddenly about and joined the caravan. The yaks, however, were of a different way of thinking—probably they had never had any previous close acquaintance with mules—for off they started across the plain, followed by their owners and three of our mules, all at full gallop. The Tibetans whistled, we shouted, while our dogs and the dogs of the yak caravan improvised a bloody melée, so that the utmost confusion and uproar prevailed. At last, however, we managed to get hold of our rebellious animals, and order was once more restored. But some perverse spirit of evil seemed to have taken possession of one of our mules, a brute called Dungan, because she was bought from a Mohammedan Chinese. A little while afterwards, without any pretext whatever, she suddenly set off at a wild gallop, until everything she carried on her back, saddle included, littered the plain behind her. We caught her,

and loaded her up again ; but, as the same manœuvre was repeated twice again, we finally led the frisky jade in a rope. The rest had also done my horse so much good that he easily knocked off the 22½ miles we did that day. Our Lama slumbered and snoozed in his saddle, and kept making the most comical lurches, so that every moment I expected to see him measuring his length on the ground ; but somehow or other he never lost his balance.

The weather was magnificent, and the two days' unbroken sunshine had thoroughly dried the ground, as well as made our loads very considerably lighter. The track now led up to a low, easy pass, marked by an obo, constructed as usual of slabs of

Our Lama in Conversation with the Natives.

sandstone, and bearing the inevitable inscription *On maneh padmeh hum!* The ground was, however, riddled all over with the runs and holes of a species of small rat, causing the horses to stumble, and making riding difficult. But their folly in undermining the highway cost some of them their lives, for our dogs hunted them incessantly. Malenki ate them up—bones, skin, and all; but Yollbars contented himself with giving them a nip in the back of the neck and a final toss in the air. The slopes on both sides of the pass were dotted with flocks of sheep and herds of yaks, with several black tents amongst them; but we saw none of the occupants.

Over on the other side of the pass we dipped down into an

open, saucer-shaped valley, fringed round with distant hills. Here from one of the tents, there emerged an old man, with whom our Lama conferred. But the nomad positively refused to either sell or let on hire his horses. Curmudgeon that he was, he even refused to let us buy milk. He had plenty, he said, but it was not for sale; he wanted it all for himself. As we advanced the track grew broader and more distinctly marked; but it was a remarkable fact that we never met any person travelling alone, either on horseback or on foot. It seemed to be the practice in that country to travel only in large companies. There was an abundance of grass, and in every direction large herds of yaks, horses and sheep, with shepherds and herdsmen in charge of them.

CHAPTER XXII.

PRISONERS.

THE tents now became much more numerous, being dotted about like black points all over the country. In one place there were as many as fourteen, all standing close together. Outside each tent there was as a rule a big pile of argol or yak dung, stacked up for winter use, though sometimes it was spread out, so as to dry the better. After a while we again passed the big tea caravan, encamped beside a small lake. We did not see anything of the men in charge of it. Probably they had gone to the nomads' tents to talk, and smoke, and drink tea. We thought it prudent, however, to continue for about an hour further, and then encamped beside a small hamlet of four tents. Our Lama paid a visit to one of them, and came back bringing with him a piece of fat and a *domba* (Mongolian bowl) of sour milk, which he had obtained in exchange for a Chinese porcelain cup.

Meanwhile we were visited by a young Tibetan, an extremely friendly and communicative fellow, who talked incessantly, although we did not understand a single word he said, until our Lama came and interpreted for us. Our uninvited guest said that he was a man of Amdo, and his dialect was very different from that spoken at Lassa. He told us the names of the nearest mountains, though I will not answer for the accuracy of his information. He said that the lake which we saw in the south-east was called Tso-nekk—that is, "Black Lake"—a name which was very likely correct, for it is a common enough designation throughout Central Asia under various forms, such as Kara-köll, Khara-nur, etc. The road we were following would soon divide, he told us, one branch going to Lassa, the other to Tashi-lumpo; and there was yet another road farther to the east, which joined the great highway to Lassa.

We were very anxious to get rid of the stranger, for we took him for a spy, who had been sent to learn all he could about us; but as the man refused to take the hint, Shagdur and I retired

into the tent and, closing the flap, had our dinner, leaving the Lama to entertain the guest. At dusk, however, the fellow succeeded in tearing himself away. He had turned his horse loose to graze, and went to catch him ; but it was easier said than done. The horse went off southwards, and for as long as ever we could see them, even with the help of the telescope, the horse was trotting on ahead and his would-be rider pegging away industriously behind him. In reply to our enquiry whether there were robbers in that part of the country, our young friend replied, " Not for us Tibetans ; but for you, who come from so far off there is no safety ! "

On Monday, the 5th of August, we covered 22 miles, and our camp that night was no. LIII. We were still pursuing the same direction (south-south-east), and soon after starting reached the shore of the lake of Tso-nekk. Almost every brook and water-course we crossed that day ran down towards this lake. Then we crossed three more passes, and so reached an extensive plain, encircled by mountains, which, especially in the south and south-east, reached a high altitude. Here we halted in the vicinity of twelve black tents. This was the limit of our journey ; thus far we were to go, but no farther—that is to say, 162 miles from our headquarters camp, and one to five days from Lassa. It was now warmer. At one p.m. the thermometer registered over 20°.0 C., or 68°.0 Fahr.

During the course of the ride we were astonished that our passage nowhere excited any attention, and that nobody came and spoke to us, although we saw Tibetans sitting outside several of the tents beside their fires, with the little children playing with the lambs and puppies. Nor did any of the curious come to visit us when we pitched our tent beside the little brook; not that we were anxious for visitors or burning to be cross-questioned. For my own part I should have preferred to go and greet our neighbours in their own tents, but thought it on the whole wiser to keep away from them.

After a thorough shaving, painting, and massaging with fat, I had my dinner and went and lay down. Just at dusk Shagdur came in and woke me up, saying there were three Tibetans approaching. The Lama and he went to meet them, while I stayed behind. It was now quite dark, and there was a fine drizzle, and as the sky was clouded, I was quite unable to make out our animals, nor could I see any of the men. My companions were absent a long time, and I was beginning to be un-

easy about them, when Shagdur at length turned up. He was, as usual, calm, but the fact of his addressing me in Russian showed that he had serious intelligence to communicate. "Things look bad for us," he said. "I did not understand a word they said, but they kept repeating incessantly 'Shved Peling,' 'Chanto' (Mussulman), 'Buriat,' and 'Lassa,' one after the other. I left them talking. The Lama is almost weeping, and is crushed with humility, and bows at almost every second word."

Soon after this the Lama himself came hurrying in, tremendously excited, and quite downcast. For some time he was unable to speak; but after he had calmed down a little his words came by jerks, and in a trembling and broken voice. To judge from his headgear, one of the men was a *noyyin* (chief or officer). His bearing was quite pleasant and polite, but he had spoken in a decided, authoritative tone, which brooked no contradiction; and yet, added the Lama, his eyes were treacherous. The chief said that three days ago they learnt that a Shved Peling, that is a "Swedish European," was on the way to Lassa; also that some yak hunters, who had just reached Nakkchu, had reported that a number of Europeans, strongly armed and with a big caravan, were coming south over the mountains. Then the poor Lama had been overwhelmed with a multitude of questions. Did he know anything about these Europeans? Were any of them with him? How many did his company number? How many animals had they? Had they any weapons? Where did they come from? Where were they going to? Why had they chosen this back road which Mongols never travel by? "You had better answer me truly," said the chief. "How can you, who are a Lama, keep company with these unknown strangers?"

Our Lama replied that he had been commanded by the *amban* (governor) of Kara-shahr, to act as interpreter to the European caravan as far as Ladak. The caravan was up in the mountains, nine days' journey distant, and whilst the caravan animals rested, he and two companions had received permission to visit Lassa.

The chief then put several searching questions about the main caravan, to all of which our Lama gave truthful answers, for he took it for granted that the Tibetans already knew all about us through their spies. He told him how many baggage animals we had, and that the men in the main camp numbered three

"Europeans" and fourteen Mussulmans. The chief's decision was this: "You must stay where you are. To-morrow I will come to your tent, and we will discuss the matter again. I will bring with me a Mongolian interpreter, so that he can talk to the other two. As for provisions and horses or yaks, we will consider all that to-morrow."

It was already late, and after picketing the horses and mules as usual, we sat round a brazier and discussed the situation. The first thing was to prepare for the cross-examination next day, and Shagdur was very insistent that the Lama should act as interpreter.

What interested me most was to learn where they got the words "Shved Peling" from. My first thought was that some rumour of my project had filtered up from the English newspapers in India; only Shved was not an English word, whereas it was a Russian word, namely, the Russian equivalent of "Swedish." Then I thought of the big caravan of Mongol pilgrims which passed our camp at Temirlik in the autumn of 1900. Could they have somehow picked up the word? But at that time nobody, not even the Cossacks, had any idea as to my future plans, and I could only suppose that the Mongols, when talking to Shagdur and Cherdon in their own language, had asked whether I was a Russian or an Englishman, and had been told I was a Shved, or Swede, a word which could not be translated into Mongolian. These people, I concluded, had carried the news to Lassa, being well aware that the warning of the approach of such undesired guests would be well rewarded. And the yak-hunters, whom we saw at Camp no. XXXVIII., would confirm the intelligence that the European caravan was approaching.

There was, however, a third possibility, namely, that our Lama, during his conversation with the Tibetan chief, had been himself the first to use the word. In that case, our Lama was acting treacherously, and Shagdur actually asserted that he would not trust him for anything he could see. His demeanour the whole time struck him as being very strange, and the purport of his conversation seemed to be of a corroborative character. The whole affair was shrouded in mystery. The only points which were certain were, that somehow or other the word "Shved" had become known to the Tibetans without their understanding precisely what it meant. To me, however, the addition of the word "Peling," which signifies "European," and has through some channel or other been introduced into Tibetan as the

equivalent to the Persian "Fereng," or "Ferenghi," made it perfectly plain what they intended. This was the first—and I am certain it will be the last—time in my life that I was not proud to be called a Swede. However much I tried, I was reluctant to believe that the Lama was behaving treacherously. I did not believe it then; I do not believe it now. The little cloud of suspicion under which he for a moment rested was soon dissipated, and I never let him suspect, even by a chance word, that the barest suspicion had ever been entertained against him. Perhaps it was for this reason that afterwards, throughout all the long journey right away to Astrakhan, he showed a devotion

A Group of Tibetans.

and fidelity which might be taken as a penance for a moment's weakness, or as if intended to atone for a passing cowardice, which, whilst it exposed me, seemed to secure him a means of retreat in case of need. One thing, however, spoke tremendously in his favour. It was his interest, as much as it was ours, to get through the ring of guards, scouts, and spies, who watched all the roads that led to Lassa from the north, without his own identity being recognised. If we were discovered and made prisoners, his position would be infinitely more serious than ours; for if I thought well to take off the mask, and proclaim myself a European, nobody would dare to injure me; whereas the Lama would have been held responsible for acting

as guide to a European in disguise, and would perhaps have been tortured to death. For this reason I do not believe that he betrayed us to the Tibetans. Besides, it is extremely likely that, even before the 5th of August, our arrival was expected. At one of the nomads' tents a man enquired whether we had seen any Europeans on the road, and the reader will remember one of the men with the tea caravan pointed to me and called me "Peling!"

For my own part, I was glad that the uncertainty was coming to an end. Something was going to happen; but what? We were now thoroughly committed to the adventure, and we should soon hear what fate had in store for us. With so many neighbours all around us, we might perhaps have thought we were safe against an attack, but nobody could tell what even they might be planning against us, and—well, for the present it would be wise not to relax our vigilance. We therefore picketed our horses and mules as usual, and kept a good watch. All through the night the dogs kept barking in the nomad encampments, the fires of which we saw glimmering through the darkness all around us. Our Lama thought that the nomads were going about from tent to tent, carrying the news of our arrival, and discussing what was going to happen.

The next day, the 6th of August, our fate was, therefore, to be decided. Immediately after sunrise three Tibetans came to visit us, though they were not the same as the three inquisitors of the night before. After tethering their horses at a suitable distance from our tent, by linking their forelegs together with a leathern throng, they came and squatted down beside our fire, and began to fill their pipes with tobacco, which was light-coloured, dry, and fine-grained. Their real business seemed to be to examine the colour of my eyes, for no sooner did I take my place between them than they asked me to take off my blackened spectacles. Now, they were no doubt convinced that all Europeans are fair, and have blue eyes. Consequently they were quite astonished to discover that my eyes were as black as their own. They were evidently satisfied, for after a series of friendly nods, they went on talking, and talked quick and fast. Then they asked to see our firearms, a request that we complied with with the greatest alacrity. They could not fail to be impressed with them. Shagdur showed them his repeating rifle, and explained to them how it was used, and I did the same with my revolver; but when we showed them how to insert the

cartridges, they shook their heads, and begged us to put the murderous things away.

Shortly after that they became convinced that they would be safer at a distance, though before going they thought well to inform us that it was a three months' journey from where we were to Lassa. Their object plainly was to deter us from continuing our journey; possibly they hoped we might turn back of our own accord. But I instructed the Lama to tell them that we required no information on that point. We were as well informed about the country as they were. Then they got up, and moved slowly and watchfully—walking backwards all the time—to their horses; nor did they mount until they thought they were well out of range of our rifles.

After that we had peace for half an hour; then we perceived four other men approaching on foot. Three of them had long black hair, and were very dirty, and were armed with swords, and carried pipes; but the fourth was a tall lama, with close-cut grey hair, and he wore a red robe and a yellow cap. He appeared to be a thorough "gentleman." He never cast a single inquisitive glance at me, nor did he ask one indiscreet question. All he wanted to know was the strength of our main camp, which we at once told him.

The old man, who wore an air of great respectability and showed some knowledge of the world, replied, with disconcerting firmness, "You will stop here three or four, or at the most, five days. This morning we sent messengers to the chief of Nakkchu, to ask whether we are to let you go on or not. In answer we shall either have a letter with instructions how to act, or our chief, Kamba Bombo, will come here himself. In any case, until then you are our prisoners. If we were to let you go on, and it afterwards turned out that you are people who have no right to go to Lassa, we should forfeit our lives. The chief of Nakkchu is the next in authority above us, and we must be guided by what he orders."

I proposed to send a special courier to Lassa to ask permission to proceed, but the old lama refused. He said it might take a month to obtain an answer that way. Then I proposed that we ourselves should ride on to Nakkchu. This also was refused. Our interviewers no doubt considered that once out of their sight, we, instead of going to Nakkchu, should be sure to press on to Lassa. And he finally cut short all negotiations by declaring decisively that there was no need to discuss the

matter further: they knew what they were about, and we were in their power. It was clear they were perfectly well aware that we belonged to the big caravan which was approaching from the north, and it was equally clear that they were fully informed about everything concerning us, and only wished to test the truth of our statements.

Before he went the old man bought a teacup from us, and told us that he would be happy to supply us with anything we wanted. During the course of the conversation our visitor let drop what rank it was he held amongst the Lamas. Whatever it was, it made a profound impression upon our modest Shereb Lama; for he at once got up, placed the palms of his hands together, and touched the old man's brow with his own. On both sides the usual formalities of politeness were observed, and neither party was sparing in their assurances of friendship and regard. At length these guests also took their leave.

We now hoped that we should be left in peace for the rest of the day; but within a minute or two something happened which filled us with a certain degree of uneasiness. There was a small group of tents about half a mile away, and from every direction we perceived little bands of horsemen approaching them, each man armed to the teeth with spear, lance, sword, and long black musket, with a forked rest to fire it from. Some of them wore tall white felt hats, with brims, others dark scarves round their heads, and all were enveloped in cloaks, brown, red, black or grey. They looked more like bandits or highway robbers than anything else; but they were evidently soldiers, mobilised to meet the threatened invasion of southern Tibet. Where had they come from with such amazing suddenness? They seemed to have sprung like mushrooms out of the ground. The vicinity of the nomads' tents grew quite black with horsemen. We counted one, two, three, up to 53 men. They took counsel with the liveliest gesture. They dismounted and put up a big white tent. They gathered round the fires in little groups. But all the time not one amongst them appeared to pay the slightest heed to us three poor pilgrims—rather an ominous circumstance that! We watched them with the greatest interest through the telescope. Our Lama was greatly downcast, and thought they were about to take our lives. Had they really contemplated anything of the sort, we were, we knew, comparatively powerless; but I thought if they really did mean to make a clean sweep of us, they could do it without

The Tibetans Charging Past Our Tent.

all that amount of ceremony, and would have a better chance of success if they attacked us at night.

The day was dull, and cold, and rainy, and every now and again the view was obscured by the mist and the blur of the rain. We were wondering and speculating as to the meaning of the Tibetans' measures, when, as if in answer to our enquiry, they executed a manœuvre which was not at all calculated to dispel our fears. After seven of them had set off at a smart pace eastwards, probably to Nakkchu, and two others had disappeared in the direction of Lassa, the rest galloped in a compact body across the plain, straight towards our tent. For one moment I really did think it was all up with us. We held our weapons ready, and sat or stood at the entrance to our tent. The Tibetans, flourishing their lances and spears above their heads, and uttering the wildest whoops, charged straight down upon us. The horses' hoofs beat ominously upon the bare ground, and the clods flew in every direction around them. Some of the men, who brandished swords, seemed to be issuing words of command. When they arrived within a few horses' lengths of the tent they pulled their horses round, some to the right, some to the left, and, thus split into two wings, returned to the point from which they started. This manœuvre they repeated two or three times, whilst a few scattered horsemen were all the while circling round our camp. Their object clearly was to inspire us with a proper degree of respect; and in this surmise we were shortly afterwards confirmed, when they dismounted and began to shoot with their long black muskets.

At two o'clock in the afternoon there was another change in the proceedings: the Tibetans, mounting again, and wrapping their cloaks about them, for it was raining in torrents, rode away towards the north-west—that is to say, in the direction from which we had come. At this I was seriously alarmed, and feared they meant to make an attack upon our headquarters camp whilst we were separated from it, and I felt strongly urged to turn back and go to my men's assistance.

As soon as the Tibetans had taken their departure and the coast was clear—at least in our immediate neighbourhood—two nomads put in an appearance from the nearest tents. They brought with them fat and sour milk, and explained that they were forbidden by their chief to receive anything in recompense. I wanted to give them a porcelain cup; but they said that without the chief's assent they durst not accept it, although

later on they returned, and said they might have it, the chief had no objection.

In this way we were entertained all day long by our neighbours. The last and most pertinacious were, however, four men who arrived about three o'clock in the afternoon. One of them was exceedingly impudent, and examined closely everything he could lay his hands upon. Amongst other things he unearthed a mariner's compass, which interested him immensely. He asked what it was, and when I described it to him minutely he exclaimed, "Just so, just so; the Chinese have things like that." Once or twice he pointed to me and said, "That man is not a Buriat." He was painfully inquisitive, and asked how it was we had chosen that back way, instead of travelling by the ordinary pilgrim high roads. "Don't you know," he said, "that you may lose your heads for coming this way? Everybody who goes to Lassa this way has his head cut off." Our Lama thought to get out of the difficulty by explaining that we had travelled in company with a big caravan from Lop-nor, and that we intended continuing to Lassa. The man answered, "You must first obtain permission of the Governor of Nakkchu." But on the whole these men too, spies though they were, were friendly and unconstrained, and promised to bring us various necessaries on the morrow. As we were unable to get rid of our troublesome visitors in any other way we went and lay down in our beds; but even that proved of no avail. The sky clouded and grew quite dark, and then the rain began to pour down in torrents. Upon that all four crept inside the tent, where we were already sufficiently cramped for room without them. And they stayed until dusk, for the rain came down in dead earnest, and was mingled with hail and snow. As our tent stood on a gentle slope, we soon had to go out and dig a trench all round it to lead off the water. After that we sat over our pipes and wooden bowl of sour milk, and chatted till ten o'clock, our damp, cold quarters feebly lighted by a miserable tallow candle. The rain pattered monotonously on the canvas; it was pitch dark outside, and the wretched weather made the dogs surly. Relying upon the old Lama's assurances that there was nothing to fear from robbers, we that night turned our animals adrift, and left them to look after themselves. I conjectured, however, that no one would want to deprive us of the means of leaving the country; on the contrary, their one concern was to get rid of us as speedily as possible. The Tibetans

offered to send us four watchmen; but we declined—it meant spies. During the night we saw several camp-fires glimmering faintly through the blur of the rain, especially along the road to Lassa. We afterwards learnt that there were that night no less than 37 outposts keeping guard all round us.

We now slept all three at one and the same time, no longer troubling ourselves about either animals or rain. It was the reaction from the forced ride and the fatigue of the past week or so which made us sleep. At daybreak next morning I was awakened by the murmur of voices; it was the first relay of Tibetans come to visit us. And all that day, the 7th of August, they kept it up, one group coming after another, so that we seldom had even so much as half an hour to ourselves. No sooner did one band depart than a fresh one appeared, and the same man seldom came back a second time. It was like a continuous changing of guards. Our very inquisitive friend of the day before came again, bringing us a bowl of sour milk, a sack of first-rate, well-dried *argol*, and a pair of bellows—this last a very welcome gift. Another Tibetan stayed with us a good three hours, drinking tea, feasting on tsamba, and smoking—in fact, he made himself quite at home. His face was surrounded by a perfect forest of black hair, which stuck out in tufts in every direction, without the slightest pretence at arrangement. The "love locks" which hung over his eyes were shortened, though that did not at all add to the beauty of his countenance. His back hair was, however, gathered into a plait, the end of which was adorned with two or three *gavos*, or cases for holding idols, and with ribbons, on which coloured pearls or stones were stitched. When he rode on horseback, he wrapped his plait round his head or round his hat. We subsequently saw many others who wore their hair in the same fashion. This man, who seemed as if he never would go, showed plainly enough that he was a spy. Indeed he was so frank as to ask us not to run away during the night, otherwise he would lose his life. He told us it was five days more to Lassa; but we subsequently ascertained that there was a properly organized post along the road, with stations where horses could be changed; for when we sent a special messenger, he returned on the second day—that is to say, he took one day to travel to Lassa, and one day to return. The name of the valley in which we were encamped was Jallokk, and that of the mountain nearest to us in the west Bontsa.

When this tiresome person at length left us, we saw three horsemen come to meet him, and then they all four remained for a good half-hour in conversation. The three mounted men were evidently questioning the spy about the observations he had made, and about the questions we had put to him. After that all four turned round, and drove our mules and horses away to another pasture-ground. Early next morning there was not one of them to be seen; but towards noon they again put in an appearance not far away. Evidently they had been driven off to prevent us running away during the night.

Amongst others who came to visit us was a long-haired old man, bent with the weight of many years, whom the other Tibetans treated with a certain amount of reverence. Although he was very long-winded in his talk, and spoke half the time in a sort of whisper, nevertheless the other Tibetans listened to him with the greatest attention. Our Lama picked up the following words which fell from him. "These three men," he said, "are not what they should be. They must not of course go to Lassa. In two or three days Kamba Bombo will be here, and then we shall see. Meanwhile we must take care that they want for nothing, and we must give them everything they need Nobody may take anything in payment. If they should make an attempt to escape, the guards must at once come and tell me, no matter when it is. Amgon Lama has consulted the holy books, and has ascertained that these men are questionable characters, and must not be allowed to go to Lassa. The hunter Onji saw them long ago amongst the mountains in the region of Merikjandsem, and he says they are an enormously big company. Intelligence was at once sent to Lassa."

"Did Amgon Lama believe that that man was a Buriat?" asked one of them, as he pointed to me.

"He said he couldn't tell," answered the old man.

Every explanation he made was received by the others with the remark, "Lakso, lakso!"—a word which signifies obedience, subjection, and reverence all combined. Our poor Shereb Lama had it constantly on his lips when talking with the Tibetans; in fact, he almost trembled before them. His attitude was painfully submissive, and his voice whining. He now pictured our future in the darkest colours, and feared the very worst.

To-day, again, there were numbers of horsemen constantly coming and going all over the neighbourhood. The whole country was manifestly up in arms. One of our guests confessed quite

openly that it was because of our big camp in the mountains. Another said they were only patrols and scouts sent out to watch and see that no enemies forced their way into the country. I was not half so anxious about ourselves as I was about the headquarters camp. Had we not been prisoners in the hands of the Tibetans, I should have at once gone back to strengthen their defence.

It poured with rain all night; and next morning, the 8th of August, I was awakened half suffocated by smoke. The tent was full of it, and the rain came in like a fine spray; it was, in fact, a regular raw, cold morning. Back with the tent-flap, then,

Tibetan Horsemen.

and let the fresh air come in! The rain might do its worst. That morning at any rate it was a comfort to be ready the moment we awoke, without having any further toilet to perform. The layer of fat that was last rubbed into my face was now covered with a thick coating of soot!

Our stream of visitors continued as on the previous day, and proved a great trial to our patience. The first to arrive were five men with a sheep. They asked us if we required anything further, and we ordered fat, butter, fresh and sour milk—all of which they brought in far greater quantities than we could use, even when we called in the dogs to help us. They then asked us whether our big camp was sufficiently near to the nomad tents

for it to be supplied with such provisions as our men might need. This was at any rate reassuring, and I began once more to doubt whether the call to arms was aimed at our main camp. We were also told that Kamba Bombo of Nakkchu and Nanso Lama were on their way, and would arrive next day. Then the cross-examination began all over again; but I told them plump and plain that they might wait until Kamba Bombo came. Whatever he wanted to know I would tell him. It was no business of theirs who we were. If they didn't stop their string of silly inquisitive questions we would not let them come into the tent any more. This disconcerted them; they bowed, cried depre-

A Tibetan Soldier.

catingly, "Lakso!" and put out their tongues. Our Lama declared that they stood terribly in awe of me. I admit our situation struck me as being not unlike that of Charles XII. of Sweden in Turkey. We had penetrated into a foreign country, a ridiculously small troop opposed to overwhelming numbers. The people of the country would not allow us to go where we wanted to go, and yet they were anxious to get rid of us at all costs.

Our Lama, however, was gloomy and despondent. He had a lively recollection of Kamba Bombo of Nakkchu, and of the thorough way in which he had searched the caravan of Mongol pilgrims with which our Lama formerly travelled to Lassa. If

Kamba Bombo should happen to recognise him again, his fate was sealed; and even if he did not recognise him, our Lama's destiny was not a little uncertain. He told me about a Mongol Lama, who for some transgression or other forfeited his right to visit the holy city, and who by way of atonement for his offence was ordered to travel from Da-kuren (*i.e.*, Urga) all the way to Lassa in the attitude of prayer—that is to say, on his knees. Flinging himself prone, with his hands stretched out on the ground in front of him, he drew his knees up towards his hands; and then flinging himself forwards again, with his hands stretched out in the same way, again drew his knees up to them; and in that way travelled the whole of the long wearisome distance—a task which took him six years to accomplish. And when he arrived within his last day's march of the city-gate, the Dalai Lama refused to allow him to enter. A second time, and yet a third time the man performed this painful penitential journey on his knees, until they became as hard and horny as the callosities on the knees and breast of a camel. Still the Dalai Lama's heart did not soften. "And now," our Lama concluded, "seeing that I have sinned in guiding you here, what will happen to me? Even if I escape with my life, my career will be ruined, and I shall never see Lassa again."

During the course of the day, Ben Nursu, the spy of the day preceding, and the day before that, put up a tent two or three hundred yards to the south of ours, and there, as he honestly admitted to us, took up his quarters so as to be able to keep his eye upon us. About noon we saw some 15 horsemen gallop to the east. We assumed that they were gone to meet Kamba Bombo, who probably was not now very far away. In the afternoon we slept for a couple of hours, being for that period actually left in peace; in fact, we had nothing else to kill the time with, except sleeping and eating and getting our meals ready. Waiting in inaction like that was exceedingly trying to our patience, and we longed for the arrival of Kamba Bombo. The only thing that consoled us was that we escaped riding in the everlasting rain, when everything was so cold, and raw, and wet, and dreary.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CROSS-QUESTIONED BY KAMBA BOMBO.

FRESH, strange, inquisitive faces kept cropping up one after the other without cessation, though one person there was who stuck to us like a leech, and that was Ben Nursu. He used to have his meals with us—in fact, he almost lived with us. But we made some use of him by setting him to blow the fire with the bellows when it rained. Hardly one of our visitors came without bringing something eatable with him; in fact, their care for us was, like their attention, touching to a degree. According to what they told us, all this was done by command of the Dalai Lama. From this we inferred that the authorities in Lassa were kept informed every day of all that took place in our camp. The mounted men who kept coming and going in the direction of Lassa were couriers and special messengers. We were also told that the supplies which the nomads brought us would be subsequently paid for by the Government in Lassa. It was on this same plan that their soldiers were supported in the field. The latter are privileged to take whatever they want from the nomads, who are subsequently recompensed by the authorities in the capital. Thus our peaceful journey had created a terrible commotion in the country. Jallokk had become a sort of standing camp; it swarmed with scouts, spies, couriers, messengers, outposts—mounted men, in fact, of every description.

About two o'clock the sun flung aside its veil and peeped out for a little. Seven old men were at this time sitting round the fire outside, keeping us company. Whilst we were thus quietly talking, all of a sudden a band of mounted men appeared in the south-east. They were riding hard, and riding directly towards our tent.

"Ha!" cried the old men; "that's the *bombo* (governor) of Nakkchu."

We rose to receive the strangers, but when they drew nearer our visitors said it was not the governor himself, but his Mongolian interpreter, accompanied by four chiefs of the neighbourhood and their respective followings.

The interpreter was by nationality a Tibetan, and his Mongolian was a good deal more halting than mine; but he was a cheerful and amusing fellow, and not in the least degree inquisitive. He told us that as soon as the news of our arrival reached Nakkchu, Kamba Bombo had at once commanded him to ride on in advance, and he, the governor, would follow after as fast as he could. Thereupon the poor interpreter immediately mounted, and with his escort rode day and night through the rain until he came to Jallokk. And then, without even pulling up at the Tibetans' tents, he had ridden straight to us.

Once more our cross-examination was begun, and for the twentieth time we gave a detailed description of our headquarters camp, and of the strength of our force. Although the Tibetans had without doubt spied out our caravan, and knew all we could tell them about it, it was nevertheless difficult to induce the newcomers to believe our statements. They had got it into their heads that our main camp did not represent the whole of our strength, but that it was nothing more than an advance guard, which would be followed presently by a force of several thousands. This fear thrust into the background all inquiry as to my real nationality. The interpreter said it did not matter where we came from, or what tribe we belonged to. To Lassa we should not be allowed to go under any circumstances; we must turn back to our main camp in the mountains. No harm would, however, happen to us, for the Dalai Lama had issued orders to that effect.

After this Shagdur and I began to talk away at him in Mongolian, until the poor interpreter must, I am sure, have been ready to give his ears for a moment's peace. We told him that the Dalai Lama had never forbidden Buriats who dwelt in Russian territory to make the pilgrimage to Lassa. If Kamba Bombo presumed to prevent us from continuing our journey, it might cost him his head. There was no need to send to him, for we refused absolutely to negotiate with anybody except a high dignitary from Lassa. Every word we said was translated by the interpreter for the benefit of his companions, who began to look quite serious. As for Russia and India, they had no very clear conceptions about them, so that what we said about the power and greatness of those powers made no impression upon them whatever. Finally we agreed that they might send a messenger to Kamba Bombo, with the request that he would hasten, though only under the condition that another messenger

went off to Lassa. The interpreter was a thorough gentleman except in one particular; he kept asking us for brandy, a commodity we did not possess. We told him it was a queer country we had stumbled into, where peaceful strangers could not travel without being set upon by robbers. He seemed to know about the theft of our horses already, and assured us that the animals should be replaced to our complete satisfaction, adding that if we wanted anything, we need only mention it and we should have it. We had told him that the chiefs of our standing camp were two "Europeans." He asked us what were their names. We told him Sirkin and Chernoff, and he wrote the names down. But when he asked us what our own names were we told him that that had nothing to do with him. We only told such things to men of distinguished rank.

After this emissary at length left us we sat up a long time as usual, discussing the events of the day and the prospects for the immediate future. As for our horses and mules, we no longer troubled ourselves about them. They were, so to speak, boarded out with the Tibetans, and we did not even know where they were.

On the 9th of August our shallow valley was again the scene of life and movement. A number of mounted men and patrols were engaged in driving the flocks and herds up into the mountains on the south-west, until the whole neighbourhood rang again with the shouts of the men and the hoof-beats of the horses, the bleating of the sheep, and the angry grunting of the yaks. At the same time small bodies of horsemen started off both towards Nakkchu and towards Lassa. We could not make out what all this meant; it looked as if the nomads were flitting to fresh pastures. But Shereb Lama, to whom everything just now presented itself in dark colours, thought they were clearing out so as to make room for the charge of the cavalry who were to ride us down.

At ten o'clock our friend the interpreter arrived again, attended by three other men. I asked him to send the latter away; there were several important matters to be considered, and I thought we could do it more comfortably without them. Against this he, however, protested most energetically; he considered it too risky to be left alone with such questionable characters as we were. Besides, he had come on a special errand, and as soon as he had delivered it he wanted to return. Kamba Bombo of Nakkchu had, it seemed, arrived with a large suite,

Tents of Tibetan Chiefs, White with Blue Borders. (Photographed on a Later Occasion.)

and wanted to see us. At the same time quite a village of tents was being run up about a mile to the south on the road to Lassa. One of the tents, a white one edged with blue, was of considerable dimensions; the others which surrounded it were of smaller size. From several of them columns of smoke began to curl up. Crowds of horsemen were swarming all round the village, and our Lama was unable to put down the telescope and tear his eye away from the scene. Clearly his apprehensions were rising. The interpreter now invited us, in Kamba Bombo's name, to shift ourselves, our tent, and all our belongings, and establish them close to his own tent; further, he invited us to go and dine with the powerful governor. The banquet was already in preparation. The place of honour was to be given to a sheep roasted whole, and there were cups for tea and bowls of tsamba; and as soon as we arrived each of us should be honoured with a *haddik*, *i.e.*, a thin, light-coloured scarf which the Mongols and Tibetans are accustomed to confer upon distinguished guests as a token of respect.

Without a moment's hesitation I replied that if Kamba Bombo had the least spark of politeness about him it was surely his duty to come and visit us first. Besides, we had never heard speak of him, and did not know what right he had to assume authority over us. He need not for one moment suppose that we should obey his request to move our camp; if he wanted to be near us, he was perfectly at liberty to come and pitch his own tent beside ours. We had no business with him, and had not sent for him. If he wanted to see us and talk to us, he was free to come to our tent whenever he chose. Our few days' stay in Jallokk had already taught us more than enough of the impertinence of the Tibetans. We were not likely to go and make ourselves neighbours of Kamba Bombo and his following unless we were actually forced to it. We were peaceful strangers from the north, and had a perfect right to make the pilgrimage to Lassa. We only wanted to know whether the road to Lassa was open to us or was not. If it was not, we should at once return to our main camp, and leave Kamba Bombo to answer for the consequences. All this, and a good deal more to the same effect, I flung at the head of the poor interpreter, until he wished himself, I am sure, miles away. His position of intermediary was certainly no bed of roses. He begged and prayed us to alter our decision and to go back with him; but we were inflexible,

"The banquet is all ready," he said, "and they are waiting

for you. If you do not come, I shall be blamed—perhaps disgraced and dismissed."

He importuned me for over two hours; but as I refused to alter my decision, he at last rose and mounted his horse. Even in the saddle he paused and once more besought me to think the matter over, pledging himself that no harm should come to us. I simply told him it was a matter of perfect indifference to me what excuse he chose to make to Kamba Bombo, but to his banquet we should *not* go; and if the governor did not see fit to come and visit us, he should never see a glimpse of our faces. Thereupon the interpreter saluted, and took his leave and rode away.

This answer in reply to a friendly invitation may perhaps seem harsh and impolite, and you may think it was not seemly in three poor pilgrims to ruffle their feathers in this way against a powerful and distinguished governor. He was the ruler of Nakkchu—the province is also called Nag-tshu, and stretches beside the river of the same name, *i.e.*, the Upper Salwin—and it was his duty to examine all caravans, and scrutinise all travellers, pilgrims, and wayfarers who approached Lassa from Tsaidam by the great highway over the pass of Tang-la. If he did not exert his authority now, when real danger was approaching in the shape of a large and strong caravan, he would be sure to lose his appointment—perhaps even his life. Besides, it was pretty clear that he had been specially commanded from Lassa to quit his post for a few days, and go to Jallokk and ascertain precisely how matters stood there.

And in truth the harshness of our answer was in no sense dictated by a love for turmoil or disturbance. But ever since we had been stopped, the Tibetans had adopted a warlike attitude towards us. They had summoned troops, and with them made a direct display of strength against us. For my own part, I will confess that I could forgive them if they had been annoyed by our enterprise, for it really was meant to deceive them. Nobody could have blamed them if they had reasoned thus about it: "Here is a European who is trying to steal into Lassa in the disguise of a Buriat; and here is a Lama, who has actually studied in Lassa, come with the stranger as his guide. Come, let us make an example of them, and show the world that schemes of this kind are bound to turn our badly." As late as the 9th of August we were still in ignorance of our fate. The only thing we knew with absolute certainty was that under no circumstances

should we be allowed to reach the capital. We naturally wondered, therefore, whether the preparations which we saw being made, and the restlessness which had taken possession of the Tibetans, really did not point to some sort of a decisive *coup*. Was this invitation at bottom only an attempt to entice us into a trap? When people go to a banquet it is customary to go unarmed. Perhaps the Tibetans were merely seeking a pretext for separating us from our weapons, of which we knew they entertained the profoundest respect. If it really was their intention not to let us escape alive from our imprisonment, we were firmly resolved we would at least make good use of the cartridges we had with us. Europeans had been known to disappear in Tibet; the last were Dutreuil de Rhins and Rijnhard, although it was not so close to Lassa as we were now. A European in disguise was naturally exposed to much greater danger, for if in the future any reckoning should be demanded with regard to him, the Tibetans would be able to reply, and quite justly, too, "We did not know he was a European; he called himself a Buriat." Thus, although several of our newfound friends had assured us that our lives were in no danger, and that no serious harm would befall us, nevertheless, in the light of these circumstances, I admit I was anything but convinced of our safety. Although I had not hesitated to expose myself to a very great danger amongst this people, who were so persistently hostile to Europeans, and although I had carried the enterprise to the utmost possible lengths, I was all the same desirous to bring the adventure to an honourable termination, and, if need be, before we would allow them to crush us, we were resolved we would up and, like the Vikings of old, "play like men."

Left thus to our own meditations, we sat for a couple of hours or so discussing the peril of our situation. During this time nobody came near us; we were as still as the grave. But the tents of the governor of Nakkchu were all alive. Men were constantly coming and going. They were determining our fate. What were they saying? What was to be the issue of their deliberations? We felt that a crisis was at hand. Perhaps Kamba Bombo was affronted by the rude answer I had sent him—perhaps he was even now preparing to give us a stern lesson. The wait seemed interminable; the suspense was fearful. I still remember it as if it were only yesterday.

At the end of two hours, or rather more, the ranks again

formed up round the white tent. The Tibetans appeared to be in desperate haste. They loosened their weapons. They mounted. Then a long black line of horsemen streamed out from amongst the tents and rode towards us at full gallop. It was not raining just at that moment, so there was nothing to prevent us from witnessing uninterrupted what was in truth a really magnificent spectacle. The Tibetans approached rapidly, keeping their horses steadily at the gallop. At first we only heard a confused hollow rumbling; but very soon we caught the swift thud, thud of the horses' hoofs beating the ground. It was as though a living avalanche were sweeping down upon us. A moment more and we should be annihilated. We held our weapons ready; but to see us standing there calmly waiting outside the tent, nobody would have suspected the terrible sense of uneasiness with which we were consumed.

On came the Tibetans in one long line stretching across the plain. In the middle rode the chief on a big handsome mule, though all the rest were on horseback. His staff of officials, military, civil, and priestly, who rode immediately behind him, were all dressed in their finest holiday attire. The wings consisted of soldiers armed to the teeth with gun, sword and lance, as though they were taking the field against a hostile tribe. We counted close upon 70 in all.

Then a small body detached themselves from the line, and quickening their pace, arrived two or three minutes in advance of the rest. They dismounted and saluted. One of them was my friend the interpreter, who simply announced that his Excellency Kamba Bombo was about to honour us with a visit. The great man himself arrived, and pulled up immediately in front of our tent. In a moment his attendants were out of the saddle, and had a carpet spread on the ground for their chief to step upon. He took his seat on a pile of cushions, which his servants held ready, and by his side sat Nanso Lama, a distinguished priest of Nakkchu.

I walked quietly forward and invited him into our tent. He at once entered, and after a little hesitation accepted the seat of honour I pointed to, a wet maize sack in the middle of our ill-smelling, almost mouldy, effects. His countenance expressed both cunning and sly humour; he blinked his eyes, and chuckled to himself. He was a man of about forty, little and pale, with a worn, tired look, though he was evidently delighted at having us safe in his toils. He knew it would be

"Not Another Step Towards Lassa."

a great feather in his cap when he reported his success to Lassa. His dress was tasteful and elegant, and he had evidently put it on specially for the occasion, for it was spotlessly clean. His servants removed his outer garb, consisting of a red Spanish cloak and a red *bashlik* or hood. He then stood forth arrayed in a suit of yellow silk, with wide arms, and a little blue Chinese skull-cap. His feet were encased in Mongolian boots of green velvet. In a word, he was magnificent. One of his men brought in pen, paper and inkhorn, and again the cross-examination began. Kamba Bombo was much less interested in us than in our headquarters camp and the strength of the caravan. He plied the pen himself, for he intended to send a detailed report to Lassa. Then he examined our belongings; but, strange to say, he never once expressed a wish to see the inside of our boxes; he was quite satisfied when we told him they contained our provisions. He seemed to have perfectly made up his mind with regard to myself, and even considered it superfluous to put any questions to me of a personal character. Shagdur, upon being questioned, adopted the tone of a field-marshal in giving his replies. He said he was a Russian subject and a Buriat, and as such had a perfect right to go to Lassa. The Russian authorities would regard it as an affront if we peaceful pilgrims were hindered from making the pilgrimage; nobody had any right to interfere with us.

But Kamba Bombo laughed, and said: "You need not think you can frighten me. I am going to do my duty. I have just had express orders from the Dalai Lama with regard to you, and I know better than you do what I have got to do. You will not go to Lassa. You will not go another day, not another step, towards Lassa. If you do you will lose your heads," and he drew his hand significantly across his throat. He added, that if he allowed us to go, he would lose his own life. "It doesn't matter the least who you are, or where you come from. Your actions are in the highest degree suspicious. You have slunk in by a back road, and must just go back to your headquarters."

We saw that we should have to obey; there was nothing else to be done. Shagdur then told him about our horses having been stolen. At first Kamba Bombo equivocated, and said he could not be answerable for what happened outside the boundaries of his own province. Shagdur replied, "Oh, so that country does not belong to you; perhaps then it belongs to Russia?" At this Kamba Bombo grew angry, and said that

the whole country belonged to the Dalai Lama. Shagdur was afterwards immensely proud of the reply he made. The chief now rose, and taking Shagdur with him, went and sat down on the cushions outside. After a little while I was called out. Kamba Bombo was willing to procure two new horses, but I must pay for one of them. I simply laughed in his face, and, turning on my heel, walked back into the tent, saying, such presents would not do for us; it must be either two horses or none. Thereupon Kamba Bombo promised to give us next morning two others in place of the two we had lost.

On the whole he was very friendly and polite, not the least bit put out at having been disturbed, and compelled to ride over himself in this way. He was an excellent fellow to have to deal with: he knew his own mind and had a will of his own. Who I really was he never distinctly understood. I fancy, though, he must have believed that under the disguise of my threadbare Mongolian coat somebody out of the common was concealed, otherwise he would not have turned out with so much pomp and ceremony. The Tibetans are in constant communication with China, indeed they are nominally subject to that power, and China maintains a representative at Lassa, and a *yamen* or official residence in the vicinity of Potala, the temple palace of the Dalai Lama. There can be no doubt that the Lassa authorities had heard of the events which had recently occurred in China, and knew what stern vengeance had been exacted for the murder of Baron von Ketteler at Peking, and so considered it prudent not to injure a European..

Whilst this conversation was progressing, the other Tibetans crowded round us, and kept making comments and observations. They carried their swords in handsome silver-mounted scabbards, decorated with corals and turquoises; silver *gavos* or cases for *burkhans*, that is, little images of Buddha; bracelets and rosaries; and in the long plaits of their hair, various parti-coloured ornaments—in a word, they were decked out in the handsomest finery they possessed. The more distinguished amongst them wore big white hats, with plumes in them; others had scarves wound round their heads, while the rank and file were bare-headed.

Shereb Lama was quite overpowered by all this grandeur. He lay prone on his knees with his gaze fixed immovably on the ground, and when the chief questioned him, which he did right sharply, was unable to meet Kamba Bombo's eye. His answers

Tibetan Cavalry.

were short and hurried, as though he had no longer any secrets to conceal. What he actually said we did not know, for they spoke Tibetan; but afterwards he told us that Kamba Bombo sternly reproached him for having come with us, and said he ought to have known that no European would be tolerated in Lassa. His name was recorded in the black books of the temples, and he would never be permitted to set foot within the holy city again. If he attempted to enter it hidden amongst a pilgrim caravan, he must take the consequences. He had been faithless to his priestly dignity, and was a traitor.

Finally I proposed that I, with the help of our Lama and the interpreter, should write a letter to the Dalai Lama, who, if he really knew who we were, would, I asserted, be very pleased to receive us. But Kamba Bombo answered that it was quite unnecessary; he himself received orders every day direct from Lassa with regard to us, and for a man in his position it would be unseemly to offer advice to the Dalai Lama; it might lead to his dismissal, if not worse.

Thereupon he politely took his leave, swung himself up into his richly-decorated saddle, and rode away at a smart trot, followed by his large staff. By this it was twilight, and the troop soon disappeared from our gaze, and with them my hope of setting eyes upon the Mecca of Lamaism. The stars twinkled brightly over the white temples of Lassa; not a breath of wind disturbed the peaceful serenity of the night, and only a dog barked occasionally in the far distance.

CHAPTER XXIV.

SENT BACK UNDER ESCORT.

THAT evening we sat up a long time talking. Our Lama was downcast and taciturn; but Shagdur and I were in excellent spirits. It is true we had failed in our attempt to enter Lassa; but we had the satisfaction of knowing that we had done our very utmost. When you meet with insuperable obstacles, it is then time to turn back, and you need have no compunction at doing so. Still, it was odd that the Tibetans released us without a single rough word.

Early on the 10th August we bade the nearest of our guards fetch our horses and mules to the tent; for we had decided to start back that morning as soon as we could get away. But as no messenger appeared from Kamba Bombo, I resolved to go to him alone, although Shagdur and the Lama both warned me against doing so. They thought we ought to continue to stick together as we had done hitherto. But, disregarding their advice, I rode at a gentle pace between the marshes towards Kamba Bombo's white-tented village. When I got nearly half way, I was surrounded by a band of armed horsemen, probably a score in number. Without uttering a single word they formed up in front of me and behind me, and when about half a mile from their tents they stopped, formed a ring round me, dismounted, and signed to me to follow their example.

After waiting barely a quarter of an hour, the same cavalcade as yesterday rode out from amongst the tents and approached us at the gallop, Kamba Bombo, in his yellow robes, riding in the middle of them. A carpet and cushions were spread on the ground, and he invited me to take a seat by his side. The interpreter was present, and we had a good talk.

This method of receiving me on neutral ground was a touch of etiquette which was as tactful as it was fully justified. The day before I had refused to accept Kamba Bombo's invitation, and he, no doubt, thought to himself: "I will show them

they need not inconvenience themselves to come and visit me." He had likewise said: "You shall not take another step towards Lassa," and so he was come to prevent me. All my powers of persuasion were, however, not more successful now than they had been the day before. "I am not going to lose my head for you," he said. "So far as I myself am concerned, I don't care a pin whether you go to Lassa or not; but I have had my orders, and I am going to obey them." I then said to him, in a jesting tone: "You and I together could go there and back in a few days, and nobody be a bit the wiser." But he only laughed and shook his head, and cried: "Back, back with you! You must go back."

Then he blinked once, twice, three times, and uttered the single word "Sahib"; at the same time pointing south towards the Himalayas. It needed no interpreter to tell me what he meant. "You are an Englishman from India!" And say what I might, argue as I would, I could not get that conviction out of his head. Finding that he was not to be moved, I dropped the mask entirely, and admitted that I was a European, though not an Englishman; but that I came from a country in the north, a long way the other side of Russia; but he only laughed and kept repeating: "Sahib! Sahib!" Then I told him that I had with me two Buriat Cossacks and two Russian Cossacks, lent to me by the Russian Czar, and asked whether he believed that an Englishman would travel with Russian Cossacks, and whether he thought it likely that they would come from the north, when India lay to the south of Tibet. To this reasoning he replied in the same terms as before: "They are all Sahibs. If you have managed to get hold of a Mongolian Lama, you could easily secure a Buriat as well."

Two horses were now led forward, a dun one and a white one; these Kamba Bombo expressed himself as willing to present to me. "Let two of your men get on their backs and take them for a gallop," I said. They did so; but the horses, which were as lean as scarecrows, stumbled and looked anything but first-rate animals. I then turned to Kamba Bombo and asked him how he, a rich and distinguished man, dared to offer to me, who was at least as distinguished as himself, two such wretched jades. I refused to accept them; he might keep them for his own cavalry. Instead of being offended at this candid observation, he commanded two other horses to be led forward. They were

plump and in good condition, and after they had been duly tried, I agreed to accept them.

After that we all rode back to our tent. Kamba Bombo sat for a good while, and ate raisins as a horse eats oats, and was entertained with tea, tsamba, and tobacco. We were surrounded by the whole of his staff, who made a fine show in their fantastic attire, their women's hats and long plumes intermingling peacefully with their warlike lances and swords. They made a gaudy picture in the sunshine; and all laughed, as in

Lamas Blowing Trumpets.

duty bound, at the witticisms of their chief. We then exchanged some of our Chinese yambas for Tibetan silver money. Kamba Bombo had a pair of scales with him, and weighed very carefully the silver we handed over to him. After that we showed him our weapons, and they evidently made a great impression upon him. I told him it was not a bit of use his raking together so many soldiers; with their wretched muzzle-loading muskets we were not a bit afraid of them. If it came to hostilities, they should bear in mind that we could shoot down three dozen of them whilst they were loading. But he asserted that they did not want hostilities; they only wanted to keep unauthorised strangers outside the frontiers of their country.

Then I asked him straight out why he durst not come to my tent without being attended by an escort of 70 men; was he really so horribly afraid of me? "Not at all," he answered; "but I know you are a distinguished sahib, and I have been instructed from Lassa to show you the same respect that we show to the highest dignitaries of our own country."

After waiting a long time, and waiting in vain, for a *deus ex*

A Lama Playing on a Drum and Metal Plates.

machinâ to open up for us the way to Lassa, I at length rose and gave orders to load up. This, with the help of the Tibetans, was accomplished in next to no time. Kamba Bombo then presented to me an escort of three officers and a score of men, who were to accompany us as far as the northern boundary of the province of Nakkchu. He assured me that as long as this escort was with us we need not trouble ourselves about anything; his men would look after our animals and provide us gratuitously with all the provisions we needed. And he wound up by making me a present of six sheep, a stock of milk-foods,

and a number of bowls and dishes of fat. Then we said good-bye to this great chief, who had been at one and the same time so friendly and so inhospitable, and who had so inflexibly barred our way, and set off to return by the road we came. "Yes, my good Shagdur," I said—the fine fellow's courage and fidelity never wavered for a moment—"it is true we have not got into Lassa; but we have preserved our lives, for which we have every reason to be thankful."

After going some distance, I turned round in my saddle, and saw Kamba Bombo and his men poking and ferreting about the spot where our tent had stood. A few cigarette capsules and tag-ends of stearine candles would no doubt confirm them in the conviction that it was Europeans they had had to deal with. It was not until we had ridden for an hour or more that we fully understood how many men our escort consisted of, for first one turned back and left us, and then another, the last being our friend the interpreter, who importuned me incessantly for brandy.

Our escort really consisted of two officers, Solang Undy and Anna Tsering, with a junior officer and 14 soldiers, armed with sword, lance, and musket. Besides these there were also six other men, who were not soldiers, and whose duty it was to lead the pack-horses which carried the commissariat, and drive before them a flock of half a score sheep. We rode at a good round pace, and I was greatly amused to observe how the Tibetans executed the orders given to them. They rode in front of us, they rode behind us, they rode on both sides of us, and never let us a moment out of their sight. If they could have done so, I am convinced they would have ridden above our heads and under our feet, so as to prevent us from climbing up to heaven or suddenly diving off to the nether world.

The day was well advanced, for we did not get started until two o'clock. Again and again the Tibetans stopped and suggested that we should encamp; evidently they did not mean to hurry themselves. But they were now under my command, and so, leaving our baggage animals behind us, I, Shagdur and the Lama rode on until we reached the vicinity of the lake of Tso-nekk. The Tibetans had promised to be answerable for our belongings, and sure enough they brought them up without grumbling. It was dusk when we halted. Our escort had with them two black tents, which they pitched one on each side of ours and close to it. As soon as the camp was quiet, the animals

were turned loose to graze under the charge of a couple of the Tibetans. Then I went and had supper with Solang Undy and Anna Tsering. The latter was a young man, with an exceptionally pleasant and sympathetic face. Both were, like nearly all the Tibetans, beardless; and Anna Tsering, with his long, black, dishevelled hair, looked very like a girl.

For some time that evening their tents hummed like a beehive: it was the Tibetans reciting their evening prayers, awak-

A Lama Reading.

ening in our Lama melancholy recollections of the evenings he had spent in Lassa, where from every temple there used to go up at that hour of the day one voluminous swell of prayer. He feared he should never hear it again.

All night long it poured with rain; but except for that our rest was not disturbed. When we arose in the morning, there were all our animals ready waiting for us; but everything was wet and heavy, and the ground greasy and slippery from the rain. Although it looked threatening all that day, the 11th August, it did not come down again. When the sun shone out,

it was almost oppressively hot; at least it burned through my thin Chinese cap. Most of our escort wore nothing more than a coarse shirt, a sheep-skin, and big boots. They had a very convenient and practical way of dealing with the second of these. When it was warm, they slipped out their right arm and pushed down the sheep-skin, so as to leave the arm and upper part of the body exposed; but when it turned cold they pulled it up over their shoulder again.

Their horses were small and plump, and had very long hair; but, in spite of their short, tripping steps, they got over the ground rapidly. Yet they stumbled a good many times and flung off their loads, or bolted with them, dragging them along the ground. As, however, the men were watchful and alert, and, as will readily be understood, accustomed to caravan-travelling, things were soon put to rights again.

One of the chiefs had brought with him a long-haired yellow greyhound, with a blue ribbon and bells attached round its neck. Before we started I advised him to leave the animal behind; but he peremptorily insisted upon taking it. Before we got very far, however, Yollbars had a go at the brute, and mauled it fearfully. The greyhound, bleeding, limping, and howling, was then taken back in a string by one of the soldiers. The men of our escort stood terribly in awe of both our dogs. Even when they were mounted, they used to ride off directly Yollbars showed himself anywhere near, and when we pulled up at night they durst not dismount until we had tied up our dogs.

It was exceedingly annoying to have to retrace our own footsteps; but our Tibetans helped to shorten the road. I never grew tired of watching those wild men in their picturesque attire—their behaviour, their method of riding and managing their horses, of lighting their fires and cooking their food—everything they did, in fact, both in camp and on the march was interesting. All except the officers were the very image of highwaymen. Whilst on the march several of them rolled up the long plaits of their hair, and tucked them under their broad-brimmed hats. Two old men, lamas, wore their hair short, and as they rode, incessantly turned their *korlehs*, or prayer-wheels, mumbling *On maneh padmeh hum!* without for one moment tiring, their voices rising and falling in a monotonous, sleepy sing-song. By this we had to some extent won the confidence of our escort, and they watched us less jealously. They chattered a good deal and were noisy, and evidently enjoyed the little trip.

A Lama with a Prayer-wheel.

Shagdur was very often surrounded by a group of soldiers, jesting and joking with them right heartily. They laughed fit to split their sides at his attempts to speak their language.

Solang Undy wore over his shoulder a red cloth scarf with four big silver *gavos* sewn on the back of it, and carried at his belt his sabre, knife, steel and tinder-box, tobacco-pouch, pipe, and various other small articles, which rattled and jingled every time he moved. Amongst those I observed a small pair of nippers, with which he used carefully to pull out the hairs that dared to show themselves on his chin. His beardless face was seamed with wrinkles, making him look like an old woman. Carefully wrapping the plaits of his hair in a red handkerchief, he rolled the handkerchief round his head, and on the top of it balanced his felt hat with a big feather in it.

After riding 3½ hours, the Tibetans stopped and dismounted, asking whether we had any objection to a short rest for tea. My two fellow-travellers voted for pushing on, but I preferred to let the Tibetans do as they wished, so that I might have an opportunity to study their habits. They said they had not had time to get their breakfast; and certainly their assertion was fully borne out by the honour they did to the dishes.

With their swords they carved three clods out of the soft, grassy soil, and upon them placed the pots in which they boiled the water for their tea. They had with them a supply of dried argol, so that the fires were soon alight. Then they produced pieces of boiled mutton wrapped up in cloth, and prepared their tsamba of fat, butter, tea and small pieces of meat. As for us, we contented ourselves with sour milk. Whilst we were at breakfast our escort informed us that they were only ordered to accompany us as far as the river Garchu-sänghi, the boundary of the province of Nakkchu. After that they did not seem to care in the least where we went. We invited them to go with us all the way to our headquarters camp, but for that they had not the slightest inclination. They said they had only to obey orders; and it was easy to perceive that they fought very shy of our caravan, and of the force which they believed awaited us there. Thus in that particular part of the road which I may call the "robber-zone," we were to be left to look after ourselves. As it was now pitch dark at night, very different from the moonlight nights of our journey towards Lassa, we did not quite relish the prospect.

After all the rain we had had the ground was, if possible,

still softer than before. The horses stumbled, floundered and stuck fast at almost every step. We seldom saw any of the occupants of the nomads' tents; our guards seemed purposely to avoid them, for they always encamped at some little distance away. Such provisions as they wanted were fetched by one or the other of them as they rode past.

That afternoon, when we stopped for good, the men of our escort procured from somewhere two additional tents, and were also joined by six more men. It was a quiet, beautiful evening, with the stars twinkling through a light veil of cloud. The camp-fires burned clear and bright under the gentle persuasion of the bellows; and the smoke from our own fire curled up through an oblong rift in the top of the tent. Altogether our camp that afternoon presented both a picturesque and an animated scene, especially as the Tibetans were full of talk and laughter.

Had Kamba Bombo been with us that night he would have discovered excellent grist for his mill, for I produced my watch and mariner's compass. The Tibetans were completely mystified by the ticking of the watch, and never grew tired of listening to it. I told them it was a *gavo*, with a little live *burkhan*, *i.e.*, talisman, or image of Buddha, inside it. As soon as they were satisfied that my Verascope camera was not a revolver, nor any sort of mysterious infernal machine, they took no further notice of it. The camp that night was called Säri-kari.

In spite of the short marches they made, our Tibetans were early astir on the following morning. They were evidently enjoying the trip, and wanted to make it last as long as possible. In proportion as we approached the frontier of the province, our guards allowed us increasingly greater freedom. They often let us ride by ourselves a good bit behind their main force; though it was never very long before we perceived two or three mounted men following a long way in the rear. Next day we crossed the spacious valley where we first came in contact with the tea-caravan. Throughout the march I was put forcibly in mind of our merry sledge-parties at home in the winter months. Every horse had a jingling bell round its neck, and the monotonous tinkle, tinkle had a very drowsy effect upon me. But just before we reached our former camp, No. LI., the Tibetans swung off to the right and entered a little glen called Digo, where they stopped amongst the high luxuriant aromatic grasses. We had only been in the saddle 4½ hours, and I thought they were merely halting for tea

again. But no, they had had enough for that day, for up went the tents. When I thought of our poor lean horses and mules I raised no objection. In fact it was quite a relief, as well as a novelty, to be exempt from the responsibilities incident to the leadership of a caravan, and after our late fatigues, and the strain and anxiety we had undergone, the long night's rests did us a world of good. So long as we were favoured with the escort, we could afford to take things quietly; after they left us we should be able to make as long marches as we liked.

The rest of the day was as beautiful as the spot we encamped

Tibetan Soldiers.

in. We set the end of the tent that looked towards the north open, so as to let in the light breezes which wafted down the winding glen; but the other end we kept shut, for the sun was decidedly hot I lay and slumbered for some time, partly listening to the babble of a little brook which mingled with the talk and laughter of the Tibetans, partly playing with the beads of my rosary, and watching the rods of sunshine, which filtered in through the top of the tent, as they glinted on their polished surfaces. The thermometer went up to 19°.1 C. or 66°.4 Fahr. In fact, it was quite idyllic and summery, the last summer day we were destined to have.

The Tibetans were masters in the art of travelling comfort-

ably and cheerfully. As soon as the order was given to halt, a troop of servants ran forward, and in a marvellously short space of time had the officers' tent up. Their saddles, bridles, saddlebags, and other accoutrements were flung carelessly on the ground round about, and their muskets placed across the forked supports, so as to keep them off the damp ground. As the weather was so fine everybody sat outside, and with the interest of adepts studied the preparation of their meals, an art that Asiatics love to practise above all others. They were unsurpassed in getting argol alight, and with the help of the bellows very clever in directing a tongue of flame against the side of their kettle, so that the water used to boil in next to no time. They prepared their tsamba in small wooden bowls very like our Mongolian bowls. Some of them used to knead the mass with their right hand, and add powdered cheese to the concoction. When they ate meat, they held it with the left hand and shaved off small pieces with a knife held in their right hand—much as an English farm labourer eats his bread and bacon. Anna Tsering used for this purpose an English pen-knife "made in Germany," which came, he said, from Ladak.

I was very anxious to secure specimens of several parts of their equipment and outfit, but they asked such exorbitant prices for them I could not deal. For a sword in a silver mounted scabbard, studded with turquoises and coral, they demanded 50 *liang* (about £8 6s. 8d.), although it was not really worth more than 11 *liang*. For a prayer-mill they demanded 100 *liang*. When I enquired about their muskets and lances, they told me they belonged to the Government, and they durst not sell them, at any price. We spent a good many hours in their tents; but they never once put foot inside ours. I suppose Kamba Bombo had forbidden them to do so, for I had said I wished to be left as far as possible undisturbed.

At nine o'clock that evening the thermometer registered 9°.1 C. or 48°.4 Fahr., and at seven o'clock next morning 7°.8 C., or 46°.0 Fahr. That day, the 13th August, there were only eight soldiers left, and they came in from the north, each leading a spare horse. They had probably been to reconnoitre, and conferred a long time with their chiefs before we got started. We now crossed the Sachu-sangpo again; it carried only one-fourth the volume it did before. This time we forded it without the slightest mishap, for the Tibetans knew exactly where the ford was; still, in the deepest places the water came up to the

horses' girths. The men of our escort pulled off their boots before entering the river, and put them on again when they were safely across.

A short distance from the right bank we came to fresh springs and good grazing, which we somehow missed on the outward journey, and there we put up for the night. We had thus done three out of the nine stages, although these three had taken us four days. Next morning the Tibetans were to leave us; but we were now on such friendly terms with them that we did not at all like the idea of parting from them; we felt we should actually miss them. We tried to persuade them to go a little bit farther; but they had done their duty, and would do no more. I threatened that, after they were gone, I would stay a little time beside the Sachu-sangpo, and then turn back, and once more make for Lassa. "Just as you please," they answered. "We were ordered to conduct you to the frontier, and we have done so."

That afternoon Solang Undy, Anna Tsering, and an old man Dakkyeh paid their first visit to our tent, and feasted upon tea and raisins. As they were now on the other side of the frontier, they no doubt thought they might allow themselves certain liberties. Dakkyeh was the little old man who once, during the course of our detention, laid down the law so positively in our tent. He was perfectly prodigious; with his bronzy-brown, furrowed, dirty, beardless face and his long, bushy, uncovered hair, he looked more like a broken-down European actor than anything else. Whenever he saw me out came his tongue as far as ever it would stretch, and up went his thumbs into the air, a delicate attention which I replied to by imitating him, and I did it with such *aplomb* that Shagdur nearly killed himself with laughing.

I now succeeded in securing a few small trifles from the Tibetans, such as a dagger, two copper bracelets, a ring, a spoon, a pouch for gunpowder, and a flute, all for two or three yards of cloth. Cloth, Chinese porcelain cups, and knives were the most advantageous commodities for barter in that part of the world. That night we slept as long as ever we could, for after the Tibetans left us, we should have to do our own night-watching. I slept thirteen hours; and when I awoke, the Tibetans asked me whether we meant to stay there or not, and when I threatened to stay, they offered to go with us until we met some other nomads. Accordingly we rode on

to the vicinity of Sampo Singhi's camp, to a spot called Gong-gakk, the chief of which bore the name of Jangdang.

With regard to the political and administrative relations of that part of Tibet, I was unable to obtain any very precise information; very probably they are not definitely fixed. I was told that the Sachu-sangpo formed the boundary line between the country of the Dalai Lama on the south and the Chinese Emperor on the north; but that the chief Jangdang was independent of both states. That the Sachu-sangpo did form an important dividing-line was evident from the fact that the Tibetans only escorted us as far as that river, and were indifferent where we went to after we were across it, as also from the fact that Kamba Bombo said he was not responsible for the robbers who stole our horses on the north side of it. When asked about the frontiers of Tibet, the Tibetans told us that in the west they coincided with the frontiers of Ladak, that east of it was eight days' journey to the boundary of China, and to the south three months (!) to the frontier of India, or Hindi as they called it. In the east of the country were two densely-populated districts, called Tsamur and Amdo; while the country to the west was called Namru.

As soon as we encamped the chiefs sent off a couple of men, as they said, to the nearest villages of Namru, and in the evening these men returned, bringing with them two or three big bowls of sweet and sour milk. The Tibetans also offered to give us all their surviving sheep; but we only accepted two, they would merely have been a hindrance to us during the forced and hurried marches we intended to make after our escort left us. Every afternoon or evening when we stopped the chiefs used to send out scouts into the neighbourhood. In all probability they were afraid our main caravan had advanced farther south, and they were anxious lest we should join forces with them, and make a concerted attack upon them, and after that cut our way through to Lassa.

Close by was a large yak-caravan, which was on its way home to Nakkchu after fetching in a load of salt.

The 15th August was the day of the separation. Our friends tried to induce us to stay yet another day, under the pretext that in the evening they expected two or three men from Namru, who would be certain to go with us if we wanted them, and watch our animals at night until we reached our own main camp. We preferred, however, to start. Solang Undy and

Anna Tsering advised us, if robbers ventured to approach our tent in the darkness simply to shoot them down. It was clear they were in no sense in collusion with the horse-thieves, for they had the profoundest possible respect for the efficacy of our fire-arms.

As we were saying good-bye Solang Undy offered to take four men and go with us to Sampo Singhi's tent; so off we all set together up the glen. On the way we met two mounted men, who turned about and likewise accompanied us. These men also were scouts, who had been out to see what our caravan was doing, and they now reported with the liveliest gesticulations the results of their observations. Although Sampo Singhi's tent still stood where it did, Sampo Singhi himself was not at home. Here our companions finally stopped. They invited us to stay the night over; but we could not accede to their invitation. We took a friendly leave of them and rode over the nearest pass to the north-west, and never saw anything more of them.

CHAPTER XXV.

BACK AT HEADQUARTERS CAMP.

ALTHOUGH our animals were in bad condition as well as exhausted, we, nevertheless, rode on at a steady pace, feeling somewhat lonely, and each wrapped in his own thoughts. The country was uninhabited except for two or three flocks of sheep and herds of yaks grazing on the adjacent hills. We stopped about an hour before sunset beside a fresh-water spring that bubbled up in a meadow, so as to give our horses an opportunity to graze before dark. The weather, which had so long been propitious, changed all at once. The sky darkened in the south-east, and unearthly-looking clouds of a flame-yellow colour, and as thick as a desert sand-storm, mounted up over the hill-tops. That meant queer weather, we thought. The wind approached nearer and nearer; it howled, it whistled. Down came the first pellets of hail, and it turned as dark as midnight.

Meanwhile we had picketed the horses and mules immediately in front of the tent-opening. The weather being what it was, it would be necessary to keep the most vigilant watch; besides which, owing to the storm, the night would be a couple of hours longer than usual. Perhaps, after having got us across the frontier, our late friends the Tibetans would no longer look upon us as guests, but would consider us hostile intruders, whom it would be meritorious to plunder. The weather could not very well have been worse. At eight o'clock the hail turned to rain, and it came down in torrents. The wind drove it against the tent with great fury, and it beat so violently upon the ground that the noise completely drowned the stamping of the horses and the drowsy footsteps of our sentinel. And it was intensely dark—impossible to see our hand before our face; where our animals stood picketed, less than three paces from the tent-door, it was simply one indistinguishable wall of blank darkness. The rain drove in as well as the wind, and all our matches were damp, so that we were unable to have even the comfort

of a single candle. The tempest howled and whistled and whined. We sat crouched together in our sheep-skins, rocking backwards and forwards, and longing in vain for daylight. All our firearms were loaded and ready for use, and our dogs tied up close beside the horses. From that spot it was a five hours' ride to our former camp, No. XLVIII., and from it a seven hours' ride to No. XLVII., but when we reached No. XLIV. we should be home again.

At eleven o'clock the rain slackened, and I went out and had a peep at Shagdur, who sat crouched under his felt rug amongst the horses, and was drenched to the skin. Just as I joined him he cautioned me to be silent and listen. There was a sound like human footsteps down beside the spring. And sure enough, I heard them too; but they were pattering steps. Then Shagdur suggested it might be a kulan, but I thought kulans would not venture so near to the Tibetans' flocks and herds. The footsteps came nearer, pattering, stealthy. Shagdur held his rifle ready. But it turned out to be only Malenki, who had been down to the brook to drink. This seemed to indicate that there was no immediate danger, so I turned in again and slept like a log till five o'clock. When the other two men called me it was quite fine.

At first we kept east of our former route, and I resumed my mapping. The surface was far easier than the old way, and there was a distinct tract along the west bank of the Garchu-sänghi. For some distance we followed the trail of a mounted man with two dogs. He must have gone that road quite recently, for their footprints had been made since it ceased to rain. Who was this mysterious horseman? What was he after? Where had he gone to? Was he a member of a band of marauders who had appointed a rendezvous in the mountains? It looked as if our footsteps were being dogged again. Perhaps the miscreants were only waiting an opportunity to fall upon us.

But as the trail appeared to lead into the heart of a range of formidable mountains, we soon abandoned it and steered a more westerly course; that is to say, we travelled north-west. Soon after passing Camp no. XLVIII., with its little lakes, the contour began to rise, and kulans and antelopes made their appearance. We liked their company a great deal better than we did that of Tibetan horsemen armed to the teeth.

At length we stopped, after travelling 21½ miles. If we meant to get home in four days we ought to have done more than that,

but our animals were dead beat, except the two new Tibetan horses, which we had to picket with special care to prevent them from breaking loose and running away back to their companions. The regions we were approaching were growing barer and barrener. The only people we could expect to meet here were yak-hunters and roving thieves. The hour or two after the tents were pitched were the pleasantest of the twenty-four. That was the only time when we obtained a little quietude, and could eat and smoke and talk in peace. As soon as it grew twilight we had to be on the alert, and as soon as ever it was dark we had to arrange the watches for the night.

That night everything was perfectly quiet. A long way off in the west the summer lightning played on the horizon, though there was no thunder. In fact, the night was so still that I was almost afraid of it. The faintest sound travelled a long distance; except for the low murmur of a rivulet, and the breathing of our own animals and my companions there was not a sound to be heard. The Lama kept talking in his sleep, and uttering Sirkin's name in a plaintive tone, as if he were calling upon him for help. As soon as day dawned we turned the animals loose to graze; this and a spell of a couple of hours in the evening was all the grazing we were able to give them, and they were generally hungry. It was for this reason that they were always straying off the path, thus making it difficult for us to keep them together.

On the 17th of August we were in the saddle nine hours, and covered nearly 25 miles. It was not very fast travelling; but then the country was in places extremely difficult—a continual up and down, with soft ground underfoot. This time we kept a good deal to the west of our former track, and ascended, by a gently sloping glen, the big range that we had crossed on our way out. On the other side of the pass we descended by another glen, which ran towards the west, and was most of the way shut in by perpendicular cliffs. In fact, it took us a good deal too far to the west; but once in it we were unable to get out again. Occasionally we saw yaks, evidently wild ones, although it was strange they should venture into such a rat-trap of a glen. That afternoon we put up our tent on a projecting crag, with deep ravines all round it, and felt pretty secure against attack. We had now little more than 40 miles left to our main camp, and with each day that passed our safety increased, although the Lama was of a contrary opinion, for

the main camp was, he thought, very likely invested by the Tibetans.

The 18th of August was a hard and toilsome day. It cost us desperate efforts to get over the big range, though on the way out we had crossed it without any appreciable difficulty. The country was exceedingly broken and irregular, and we traversed no end of trenches, marshes, and miry pools, where the animals dropped in up to the fetlocks. All the watercourses were alike directed towards a little salt lake in the west-south-west. The entire region—hills and mountains alike—was of a brick-red colour, the predominant geological formation being

A Camp in the Tibetan Highlands.

red sandstone. Another pass, and we dipped down into a depression in which lay yet another lake. Here the surface was exceedingly trying. It was as if for centuries past all the mud and mire had been washed down from the adjacent heights, till it covered the plain to an immense depth. There was not a foot's breadth of hard rock anywhere. Fortunately for us it was fine weather; had it been raining, it would have been utterly impossible to advance. We were here a good bit west of the lake where our horses had been stolen. Between two and four in the afternoon, two of the mules showed signs of distress, and we pulled up to give them a little breathing-space. Meanwhile we ourselves dismounted, and drowsed and basked in the sun. The air was still, and the thermometer registered 19°.6 C., or 67°.3

Fahr. in the shade, a temperature sufficiently warm at those altitudes to make us somewhat afraid of sunstroke. An hour later and it was hailing, and we were again in the middle of winter. After the rest it was harder work than ever to get into the paces again. The continual marching and night-watching were terribly trying.

Just as we were slowly approaching the top of a hill, Malenki rushed off to a neighbouring hill and began to bark furiously. Fearing there were people there, I hastily rode after him, and nearly stumbled on top of a bear, which was busy at work scratching out a marmot. As soon as he caught sight of me he leapt up and went off at a trot, followed by the dogs. The latter soon overtook him, whereupon Bruin faced about and prepared to give Malenki a hug. At this the dog turned tail and raced back to us. Yollbars, however, danced round and round him for a long time.

As the animals were going slower and slower, we found it necessary to stop at the first grass we came to. The sky looked forbidding, for the clouds were of the same red or fiery yellow colour as the earth. Then followed another long wearisome night. This time we had not only to keep watch against the Tibetans, but also against bears. The message of the night is always sublime, except when you have to guard horses in Tibet. For the future I should always feel a certain amount of sympathy with the men who were out with the animals on night duty. Each of us kept watch in his own particular way. I used to write, sit in the tent door, and make the round of the camp at intervals. Shagdur used to wrap himself in his sheep-skin, and go and sit amongst the horses and smoke. The Lama used to pace backwards and forwards, mumbling prayers in a sing-song tone. We were now only about 20 miles from camp, but as our beasts had already done 300 miles, there was little likelihood that we should be home next night. Still, if all went well we should get near enough to be within reach of its protecting arm.

Next morning, after turning the animals adrift for a good browse, we went back and finished our sleep. When we started again we hoped to see on the other side of the first pass the broad open valley in which we had spent the first night of the journey, but instead of that the pass showed us nothing but a confused assemblage of hills. The surface below the pass was the very slough of despond. We were forced to get off and walk and hop

as well as we could from one sandstone slab or mossy clump to another, or else we dropped in up to the knees. The poor beasts! their bellies actually grazed the ground; it was like marching through a river of mud. Every time we observed a spot that looked rather dry, we used every effort to reach it, so that we might get a moment to catch our breath and re-adjust the loads. This hideous pass was followed by two others equally as bad. Had I had the smallest suspicion of it, I should of course have stuck to our old route, which appeared to be a sort of foot-bridge leading across the quagmire.

At last, however, although we were all pretty nearly completely

A Camel Sinking in the Quagmire.

done up, we struck a little glen which led us out into the open valley we were so eagerly longing to reach. When we stopped, we found that, whilst ploughing through the mud, we had managed to lose the spade. The Lama went back to look for it, but returned without it, though he did not return altogether empty-handed, for he brought back with him an old Tibetan tent-pole, which came in wonderfully useful for making a fire. The country abounded in partridges, hares, and kulans, and, as was usual amongst those unhospitable mountains, the ravens appeared to be the principal inhabitants.

It was delightful to ride over firm ground again. For some little distance nine kulans kept us company. Upon reaching the top of an eminence, we rested a few moments to take a look

round us. There was no smoke, no black dots, no signs whatever of our caravan or its animals. The region was as silent and deserted as when we saw it last, absolutely nothing to indicate there were human beings within many miles of the spot.

Although the sun was sinking rapidly, my companions seemed to think that we could reach home before dark. As a rule we used to drive the mules all together in a clump; but here, as the pasture was better, we kept them tied in two strings one behind the other. Shagdur led three of them, and the Lama the other three, while I urged them on in the rear. Shagdur was a long way ahead when my white riding-horse, though I was not at the moment on his back, suddenly fell and was unable to get up again. I thought his last hour was surely come; but the Lama smeared his nostrils with butter, and forced him to munch garlic. Big tears rolled down his cheeks; Shagdur said it was because he was unable to finish the journey. This decided the matter; we encamped for the night, and turned the animals loose to graze. The night passed peacefully. The dogs never growled once, but we observed no traces of our men's camp-fires.

On the 20th of August we started off again in the pouring rain, though it inconvenienced us but little, for the surface was almost everywhere hard and firm. Even the white horse managed to hobble along with us. Soon after passing the red hills near which we made our first camp on the way out, we heard two rifle shots, and a short time afterwards a third. Then we saw a yak lumbering up over the hills. We at once directed our steps towards it, and soon perceived two black dots advancing behind it; after a little the telescope showed us they were mounted men. Were they Tibetans? No, for they were riding straight towards us. We stopped and watched them, and after a while recognised Sirkin and Turdu Bai. We at once dismounted and waited until they came up. They almost wept with joy at the success of their day's sport; when they started out in the morning they little dreamt what "bag" they would make before night. It was very fortunate for us that we did thus stumble across them in the wilderness, for it would have been difficult for us to find them, now that the rain had completely obliterated their trail.

Some little time back Sirkin had flitted the camp into a side-valley on the south side of the river; but it was so masked by

the formation of the ground that it would have been difficult to find it without help. We all rode on together, and after a while perceived Kutchuk, Ördek, and Khodai Kullu running to meet us, with tears in their eyes, and crying " Khodai sakkladi ! (God has preserved you !) Khodai shukkur ! (God be thanked !) We have been like orphans while you have been away ! " Their delight was quite touching.

An hour later and I was sitting once more in my comfortable yurt, with my trunks around me, and my nice warm bed all in order. After the month's privation and hardship we were delighted to return to "civilisation." Sirkin reported that one of the horses had died and that the others had not yet recovered,

Caravan Animals Grazing.

but the camels were very much stronger. He had, as I have already said, let the chronometers run down, having been afraid to wind them up for fear of breaking the springs. As a consequence of this, the first thing to be done was to return to Camp no. XLIV., from which we started when we set out for Lassa, because I had already determined its position astronomically. This meant, of course, the loss of a few days ; but the horses and mules which had been with us would be all the better for a rest. During our absence it had rained nearly all the time. The men had occasionally made short excursions about the neighbourhood, and shot some kulans. Chernoff had succeeded

so well in his task that when he arrived, on the 2nd August, he brought nine camels with him; he had only lost two camels and two of the horses. One of the former was my old veteran from the Keriya-daria, 1896.

All the men were well, and in the very best of spirits that evening. They confessed that after Ördek returned they had feared the very worst, and scarcely dared mention our names, but simply waited and waited. Yolldash nearly barked himself into fits with joy, and at once resumed his place by my bed-side. As soon as I had inspected the camp, I asked Cherdon to get me a bath ready. He filled the biggest tub he could find with warm water, and carried it into my yurt. If ever a thorough ablution was necessary, it certainly was in my case, for I had not washed for 25 days. The water had to be changed several times. It was quite a treat to put on clean European clothes from top to toe, and take a long last farewell of my Mongolian rags. After a good dinner, and after writing up the events of the day, I went to rest with a good conscience, and enjoyed *con amore* the peace and comfort which surrounded me.

I was satisfied to have made the attempt to get into Lassa; and neither then nor now do I regard the attempt as a mistake. There are hindrances which no power of man—individual man—is able to surmount. It was upon such that my venture had stranded. Compared with the month which we had just lived through, the few weeks that followed stood out as, comparatively speaking, a period of rest. Everything was pleasant and easy; even the rain pattering on the roof of the yurt was a pleasant thing to listen to, and the monotonous song of the night-watchman lulled me to sleep. I was glad I had not to go out and keep guard over horses. As I dropped off, I heard Shagdur and the Lama snoring righteously in their tent.

Next morning nobody had the heart to waken me, so that it was mid-day before we got started. As we advanced along the right bank of the river, I noticed that my men had built up stone pyramids on every outstanding eminence, and in the distance they looked like Tibetans. These were intended to guide us had we gone back to Camp no. XLIV. If any Tibetans saw these landmarks they would, I am afraid, accuse us of having planned a highway by which a large army would soon travel to invade their country. I also noticed an obo up a side valley; it was as usual built up of a number of sandstone slabs, with the

usual formula, "On maneh padmeh hum," incised upon them. Upon reaching the camp we pitched our tents on the same sites they had occupied before.

The journey to Lassa seemed like a dream. Here I was sitting on precisely the same spot and amid precisely the same surroundings as a month before; the yurt was standing on precisely the same circular plot, the supports of the theodolite stood in precisely the same holes, and the river babbled as before. It was as if only one or two days had passed. All those long nights of watching and anxiety were forgotten; the venture was nothing more than an episode, a parenthesis, in the course of the journey.

After this there followed several days of rest. It rained and snowed incessantly, and I was not able to take all the astronomical observations I wished. I was, however, anxious to be off again southwards, impatient to reach inhabited districts where we could get some assistance, for it was perfectly evident that our animals would not be able to advance very much farther. Not far from the camp Turdu Bai and Cherdon showed me a place where, on the very day of our departure, they surprised a band of Tibetan hunters. Those heroes had however been so startled that they went off in a panic, leaving behind them 17 pack-saddles, a tent, and the whole of the meat which constituted the produce of their chase. Everything was still exactly as they left it, except the meat, which had, no doubt, proved acceptable to the wolves and ravens. You may imagine what wild rumours these panic-stricken fugitives would circulate as soon as they reached inhabited regions. They would, of course, greatly exaggerate, and assert that an entire army of Europeans was on its way to invade the country; as indeed we heard ourselves at Jallokk.

Although discipline had been maintained during my absence, after my return I sharpened it up a little more. Our animals were grazing in a valley a mile or two away. One night, when Chernoff rode out to them he found the watchmen asleep. He thereupon discharged his rifle, startling them not a little, and after that gave them a good drubbing. Next day the culprits came and complained to me; but instead of giving them any countenance, I hurled at their heads a new rule which I formulated on the spur of the moment—"Any man who shall hereafter be caught sleeping at his post shall be awakened by a bucket of cold water." Six Mussulmans were told off to keep

watch every night, two and two turn about, and it was the business of the Cossack who happened to be on duty for the day to see that the men were duly relieved in succession. As a consequence of Chernoff's action Mollah Shah and Hamra Kul wanted to return to Charkhlik, but quieted down when I made them realise the folly of the idea. Quarrels and bickerings like these cannot very well be avoided in a large caravan, in which inclination and taste differ according to the views and customs of Christians, Mussulmans, and Mongolians.

I now appointed Cherdon my cook; Shagdur was to rest for a time, and also the Lama, who was gloomy and thoughtful. The old man, Mohammed Tokta, who had for some time been unwell, grew worse at the end of a week, and complained of pain in his heart. I recommended him to keep perfectly quiet. The whole camp was now in the best of spirits. The Cossacks made a *balalaika*, or stringed musical instrument, and with it, a Tibetan flute, a temple bell, makeshift drums, the musical-box, and some singing, they contrived on the last day of the holiday to organize, amid the pouring rain, a concert which earned tremendous applause, any lack of harmony being more than counterbalanced by the energy displayed.

XI.

Across Tibet to Ladak.

A Chain of Highland Lakes.

CHAPTER XXVI.

SOUTH AGAIN.

On the 25th of August we made a fresh start, and bent our steps south in quest of new experiences and new adventures. Our goal was now Ladak, but I was firmly resolved that I would not turn to the west until I was absolutely compelled. We knew that the Tibetans were on the alert, and the whole country in a state of siege; the troops were already mobilised, and we might safely reckon upon coming sooner or later face to face with them. But until we did, our course was south.

Strange to say, during the night that preceded our departure three of the horses turned queer, though none of the three had accompanied us to Lassa. One staggered and fell repeatedly; another actually died before we got out of camp; and the third, which I had ridden only four days before, just managed to struggle over the first pass, when down he went, and never got on his feet again. It was a depressing beginning, and proved conclusively that sooner or later we should be dependent upon the Tibetans. When I was called it was snowing fast, and when we started the rain was coming down in torrents. The day's march proved to be one of the very worst we had ever had. The entire country looked like one gigantic dumping-ground for the mud and slush of half the cities in the world. Horses, mules, camels, and men all sank deeply into it, and were unable to find firm foothold. The poor camels, linked one in front of the other, constantly stuck fast and broke their nose-ropes. And all the time it went on raining, raining, raining, as if it would wash the very hills themselves away. Over on the other side of the pass things mended a little. Thanks to the scanty sunshine, the southern slopes were generally better than the northern.

Next day both the weather and the country improved, but it was still a barren region, and ill-supplied with game. As the ground looked levellest towards the south-south-west, we bent our course in that direction. Some 20 to 25 miles west of our

route was a small mountain group, capped with snow, and bearing rudimentary glaciers on its shoulders; and, very exceptionally, it was continued southwards by a chain overtopped by an occasional snowy peak.

Some time back Chernoff had reconnoitred that part of the country, and he now came to tell me that near a spring a little bit farther on he had observed distinct traces of camels. When we passed the spot on the 27th August, he pointed it out to me, and sure enough there had been a large herd of camels grazing there. Where they came from, and to whom they belonged, was a puzzle we never cleared up. Turdu Bai declared he had never been there with our camels. Perhaps they belonged to a Mongol caravan, which had strayed thus far out of its way. That same day we must also have crossed Captain Bower's route, but had no possible means of identifying precisely where. On our right was a long shallow lake, also lying north and south, while to the south another mountain-range ran at right angles across our route; but we only managed to reach its foot, and there pitched Camp no. LXVII. The autumn had already begun; the thermometer registered a minimum of $-5°.1$ C., or $22°.8$ Fahr., while during the day it did not rise above $7°.9$ C., or $46°.2$ Fahr.

When the men were loading up on the 28th, one of them came to me and said that Kalpet, a native of Keriya, was missing. Upon enquiry, I learned that Kalpet the day before had complained of pain in his chest, and had lagged behind. The men believed he had followed slowly on in our trail, and had reached camp after dark without anybody observing him. But now he was nowhere to be found. I therefore sent the animals back to graze, and despatched Chernoff and Turdu Bai on horseback with a mule to bring the man in, no matter in what condition they found him. He might have been taken suddenly ill on the road; in any case, he must be in a bad way, seeing that he had not been able to follow us, and had had nothing to eat for 24 hours. Chernoff and Turdu Bai returned at the end of a couple of hours, bringing the poor fellow with them. We nursed him as well as we possibly could, and when we at length got under way, we let him ride on the mule.

Although the ground was firm, the day's march was extremely tiring, because of the great number of passes and ranges we had to cross. The morning was fine; but about eleven o'clock it clouded over, and after that snowed smartly at intervals.

Camp no. LXVIII. was 16,628 feet above the level of the sea. At nine p.m. the temperature was down to – 1°.9 C., or 28°.6 Fahr., and during the night it touched – 6°.2 C., or 20°.8 Fahr. In the morning the ground was slightly frozen and covered with thick rime-frost like snow, though it disappeared quickly when the sun rose. The mountain-ranges again ran from west to east. We crossed three by low, but difficult, passes; a fourth was pierced by a stream, and we accordingly followed its bed. The sites of old encampments were again very common, being indicated partly by the usual three stones for supporting the cooking-pot, partly by the bones of wild yaks

Sirkin's Kökkmek Goat.

and arkharis (wild sheep). Other signs went to show that that part of the country was visited by nomads as well as by hunters. Hares were plentiful, as were also yaks and wild sheep. One poor puss was chased by all seven dogs, and Yolldash caught her. Yollbars usually took these things quietly until the victim was caught, and then he displayed a superabundance of energy. Finding good pasture near one of these old encampments, we granted our tired animals an extra day's rest. The weather was perfect, the smoke went straight up, and our exhausted animals revelled in the good grass.

Shagdur and Turdu Bai, whilst reconnoitring towards the east, discovered a series of *ilehs*, or boundary-marks, built, some of them of stone, and others of sods. They extended a long

way to the south, and stood so close together that Shagdur thought they were intended to mark the boundary of a province, more especially as there was no indication of a trail, which they might otherwise be supposed to indicate. Sirkin shot a *kökkmek* goat, which I photographed, and then Shagdur shot a second. This last, as well as a pretty little *yureh* (*Antilope Cuvieri*), were set up in the evening, with the help of sticks and other supports, in the natural position the animals assume when leaping; and in the morning they were frozen so hard that they stood by themselves. This was done that I might have an opportunity to photograph them. Seven or eight wolves prowled about the camp all night, howling in a most unearthly way.

A Frozen Deer and Goat.

We had, however, reached a much more hospitable country; the ground was firm, pasture commoner, the contours dipped towards the south, and we no longer had occasion to force difficult passes. The temperature, too, was higher, sometimes as high as 18°.2 C., or 64°.8 Fahr. All the streams of the district converged upon a little salt lake that lay south-west of our course. Beside it were some unusually big eagles, with their young ones scarce able to fly. The latter were set upon by our dogs, but defended themselves so successfully with beak and claws that the assailants were forced to retire baffled.

That night, in the still, clear, bright moonlight, a flock of wild-geese flew over the camp towards the south-east; they were

A Visit from the Shepherds of Jansung.

no doubt on their way to spend the winter in India. On the 1st of September we crossed the next mountain-range, which was built up entirely of soft material, and exhibited rounded forms throughout, by a pass 15,929 feet above sea-level. From its summit the view southwards was unusually broad and open, though on the horizon a slight deepening of colour suggested another range; but, except for that, the surface appeared level for fully two days. The country was very much greener than hitherto; nevertheless, there were no nomads; all the encampments we passed were old ones. After doing 12½ miles, we halted beside the first watercourse that contained water. Next morning the camp was astir at four o'clock. Further south the men pointed out some black dots, which they took for wild yaks, but which a glance through the telescope proved to be horses. Our Lama and the three Cossacks who were not on duty rode off to see what they were; though the Lama soon came back, leading his horse, for it had broken down. The strange horses were fat and in good condition, but shy. There appeared to be nobody in charge of them, nor was there any indication that anybody had gone off on the approach of the Cossacks. Apparently their owners considered the country quite safe, though we should not have dreamed of turning horses out without somebody to keep an eye upon them. However, the little excursion brought one advantage, in that it led to the discovery of still better pasture-grounds.

Early next morning our Lama, Shagdur, and Sirkin went out in quest of the Tibetans, who we suspected could not be very far away, for the hills about a mile farther on were dotted all over with probably a thousand sheep, besides a herd of yaks. Shortly after noon our Lama came back with a *domba*, or "bowl," of milk, and behind him appeared the two Cossacks, literally driving on before them three Tibetans, who were leading their horses, and one sheep. My men had stumbled upon a tent containing 13 inhabitants, most of whom alleged they were neighbours come on a visit. When my men appeared, the entire company took to their heels and fled in different directions; but as they went off on foot, they were easily caught and driven, as I have said, towards us. But they were too terrified to be very communicative, and the little information we were able to extract from them was not very valuable.

They said the district was called Jansung, and the *bombo*, or "governor," who lived near the big lake of Selling-tso, would

cut their throats if they sold us any of the necessaries of life, and they distinctly refused to do so. But after Shagdur—he hated the Tibetans, since they had prevented us from going to Lassa—had given one of them a taste of his riding-whip, they proved more complaisant, and agreed to let us have a sheep and a bowl of milk. They had so recently arrived that they had not yet had time to prepare sour milk, and the fresh, untrodden appearance of the grass around their tent corroborated their statement.

"Where are you going to?" asked one of the men.

"To Ladak," answered our Lama.

"Then you are a good deal out of your way. You can't go more than a day's journey farther south. Your road will be stopped by the lake of Selling-tso, around which are much people." Their immediate chief was, they said, Banching Bogdo, who dwelt at Tashi-lumpo, but they did not know how many days journey it was to that temple. To the east, Kamba Bombo ruled over the province of Nakkchu, and to the south-east the Dalai Lama over the country around Lassa.

The three men approached our camp with evident trepidation. We invited them to take their place on a felt carpet just outside the yurt, and served them with tea and bread, which, after some hesitation, they accepted. For the sheep, which was at once slaughtered with the usual Mussulman ceremonies, we paid them in Lassa money, and gave them a porcelain cup for the milk. They could not sell us any horses, they said, because the horses were not theirs. They sat the whole time as if upon thorns, although our Lama did his best to reassure them by telling them no harm should happen to them. As soon as we had got all we wanted out of them we let them go, and they were up in their saddles in a moment. In the meantime I had got my camera ready, and our Lama diplomatically detained them with a final question, as well as by holding one of the horses by the bridle, and by that means I managed to snap the three half-wild riders. They were bare-headed, though armed with swords. The moment the Lama released the bridle, they pulled round and galloped off with dangling rein, looking behind them as if they were afraid they would hear a bullet whistling on their track. As soon as they thought themselves safe out of range, they slackened speed, and began to talk vivaciously. They no doubt wondered what strange people these were who had behaved so nicely towards them.

Our Lama Detaining the Three Tibetans.

On the 3rd of September we travelled 18 miles south-south-west, across an open, flat, level country, studded with numerous pools and small lakes, and clothed in many parts with first-rate grass. There was no hindrance in our path, and I assumed that Selling-tso lay between ourselves and the low hills which glimmered indistinctly on the southern horizon. We now kept all together, the sick camels not being allowed to lag behind. At intervals there were big flocks of sheep with their shepherds, but no dogs; these were all kept beside the tents. The Lama and Shagdur visited one of the tents, and brought back a domba of sour milk. As we advanced, the black tents of the nomads became more and more numerous, and in some places actually formed villages. As the Cossacks were leaving one of these villages, they were followed by a horse which had broken loose, and was particularly lively. Its owner and another man, besides an old woman, two young women, and a boy, came running after it to catch it; but when they tried to approach it with a rope it bolted, and came to us. At last we had to turn out and help the people to recover their property.

The young women wore their hair divided into an endless number of small plaits, which hung from the forehead down the back and sides of the head in the shape of a fan, the ends being fastened to a strip of red cloth decorated with various kinds of ornaments. From the middle of the strip of cloth another broad, embroidered, multi-coloured strip hung straight down the back. They were bare-headed like the men, and, like them, wore sheep-skin and boots. Where the natural roses should have adorned their cheeks, they had rubbed into their skin some brownish-red colouring matter, and thus given rise to two cakes of thick shining varnish. Two or three of their tame yaks, upon being attacked by our dogs, sought refuge in the middle of a pool, till the water came up to their jaws. Then, as they had only their heads exposed, and they were protected by a pair of very respectable horns, the dogs, after swimming round them a time or two, were forced to beat a retreat. This extempore aquatic pantomime excited the utmost hilarity amongst the men of my caravan.

Early that morning, six soldiers with white hats had suddenly appeared on our left flank. and thereafter accompanied us, but at a respectable distance. Another body ot seven now appeared on our right hand. Thereupon the first band rode in a long sweeping curve behind us, until they joined hands with the

second band, and after that both bands together circled round our caravan, sometimes before us, sometimes behind us, sometimes to the right, sometimes to the left, sometimes riding slowly, at others galloping. I suspect they were executing some sort of manœuvres with the object of terrifying us. But when we simply continued to move steadily on, they approached within a couple of hundred paces of our rear, and entered into lively conversation with our Lama and Shagdur, who hung back to talk to them, after which they dismounted and entered one of the tents.

Meanwhile we arrived at the bank of a large river flowing from the east, which I soon recognised again as the Sachusangpo. The question was how were we to get across its broad stream. The Cossacks went in search of a ford. Whilst we were waiting for them, Ördek took off his clothes and waded through the river at a point where it was divided by a mud island. In the nearer arm the water came up to his neck, but in the farther arm it only reached to his arm-pits. When he returned, he tried another place; but had to take to swimming. Here then it was impossible for the camels to get over, especially as the bottom consisted of treacherous mud.

Meanwhile the Tibetans had come up, and riding to the top of the hill beside the river, saluted with loud cries the obo which crowned it, and then turned and watched with the greatest interest what we were about. Naturally they did not volunteer to give us any information, and we on our part did not ask them for any. After a short march beside the river, I commanded a halt, and bade the men pitch the tents. We at once unpacked the boat and put her together, and then, with Ördek for my boatman, I sounded the river to see how deep it was. As soon as we discovered a suitable ford, we intended to stretch a rope across the river and back again, and so ferry all the baggage over in the boat, while the camels waded across without their loads and pack-saddles. Meanwhile the Tibetans moved a short distance below our camp, and there sat watching us as mum as mice, thunderstruck at our having in some mysterious way conjured forth such a wonderful thing as a boat. At one time we thought of crossing in the darkness and silence of the night, so that next morning we should have disappeared; but we abandoned the idea because of the risk of the camels catching cold. In the evening, however, I made up my mind that we would not cross the river at all but would travel down its right

bank till we came to the Selling-tso, which we would then skirt by the western shore, because Littledale had formerly travelled along its eastern shore.

The evening was still and bright, the silence broken only by the ripple of the stream, the tones of the balalaika, and the barking of the Tibetans' dogs. We saw the soldiers' bivouac fires on a hill to the north-west of our camp.

Next morning whilst we were busy measuring the volume of the river—it amounted to 2,402 cubic feet in the second—the chief of the district turned up with a band of soldiers, and for

Tibetan Women.

some time watched with speechless amazement what we were about. Then, singling out the Lama, he demanded to know distinctly what our intentions were, and assured us that if we would travel direct to Ladak, he would not only procure us guides for the first ten days of the journey, but would also sell us horses and sheep, and everything else we required; but if it was our intention to go to Lassa we must wait till he sent a courier there to bring back an answer, and that would perhaps take a month. If, however, we pressed on straight for Lassa, he should forbid the nomads to sell us anything whatever, and at the same time he and his soldiers would do all in their power to prevent us.

If he did not do so, he and his men would lose their heads. "And serve you right, too," I observed. Whereupon he laughed, and remarked that it would no doubt be advantageous to us, though hardly altogether pleasant for them. Finally I told him we wanted neither him nor his guides; we knew perfectly well where we were, and which way we wanted to go.

"Yes," he answered undismayed, "you may indeed take our lives; but as long as we retain them, we shall do our best to hinder you from going further south."

The camels were driven in, and the caravan started, having orders to keep as near as possible to the right bank of the river. Then I and Ördek embarked in the little skiff to drift downstream. The trip was one of those delightful interludes in my Asiatic travels like the journey down the Tarim two years before. Immediately below our camp the river made a sharp bend, so that for a short distance we were actually drifting towards the east-north-east. The hill from which the Tibetans watched our proceedings consisted of conglomerate and red and green sandstone, and plunged steeply into the stream. The river was here narrow and the current exceptionally swift, and when it carried us close in under the precipice the Tibetans greeted us with wild shouts. I was afraid they were going to bombard us with stones, and was very glad when we got past that ugly place.

After that the river nowhere flowed through a rocky conformation, but became perfectly straight, being enclosed between terraces of clay 12 to 16 feet high. The adjacent country grew flatter and more desolate as we advanced. At the same time the river-bed widened out, and was beset with an increasing number of mud islands, which divided it into several channels. Ördek began to ply his oar, and down the Sachu-sangpo we danced at a lively pace. After a while, however, the muddy stream turned towards the south-west, and we had on our right a low range of hills, the hollows and declivities of which were dotted over with tents, and flocks of sheep, and herds of yaks. We could not see the caravan for the high bank, but Chernoff rode along the top of it, and so maintained communication between us. In the afternoon a keen south-west wind got up and made the river rough. This hindered us, while at the same time we were smothered in clouds of dust. The next time the caravan reached a suitable pasture they halted, and their example was followed by the Tibetans, who had faithfully dogged their footsteps all day.

Now that our sick camels had no passes to climb, they kept up pretty well. Mohammed Tokta was, however, in a very bad way; he appeared to suffer from an affection of the heart. Kalpet was pretty much in the same condition, still and quiet. He had no friends amongst the other men, and they said he was not ill at all, he was only malingering. One of them beat him because they had to do the work which he formerly had done. I confess I did not know what to believe; for, strange to say, the man had a voracious appetite. Fortunately I did not reproach him; I contented myself with asking Chernoff to keep an eye upon him, and I was glad I did so. I should have been

Two Shepherd Boys.

sorry if I had behaved unkindly to him, for the man really was ill, and he was friendless as well.

Next morning, the 5th September, the weather looked threatening, and although a fresh breeze set in about noon—you could feel distinctly that it blew off water and not off the steppe—the atmosphere remained clear. At one place the river was narrow and confined, and lintels of sandstone ran athwart its course and broke its current into cascades. We passed them, however, without difficulty. About the same spot a deep ravine came down out of the mountains in the north-west; but, although it only contained a little stagnant water, it was difficult and even dangerous for Chernoff to ride across; its bottom consisted of extremely soft mud. The banks in this part of the

river's course were as much as 22 feet in height, and very often perfectly vertical, and gapped by a vast number of narrow ravines and gorges. The depth was here pretty constant at about three to four feet. It was plain the lake had once been a good deal bigger than it was then, and the stream in that part of its course was cutting its way through its own former sedimentary deposits.

Then the river took a sharp turn to the north-east, and after a long, tiresome curve flowed almost due south. Here its bed contained only two or three mud peninsulas, and the banks increased to over 26 feet in height, though subsequently they decreased in proportion as the river-bed broadened out from 350 yards to a quarter of a mile. Through this peculiar funnel-shaped channel the wind blew dead in our faces and the skiff pitched violently; so that, although Ördek laboured unweariedly at the oar, we made scarce any progress. In the distance, that is, to the south, the banks diminished in height, opening out a boundless vista, at once enchanting and sublime. We were now close to the Selling-tso; though how close it was impossible to tell, owing to the atmospheric reflection of the water. Although the range which stood on the east shore of the lake was distinctly outlined, nevertheless it appeared to be hovering in the air, on a stratum of the atmosphere which quivered and undulated in a most confusing way. It was just the same with the camels which were marching about a mile west of us: they seemed to be stalking along on long, thin stilts, and the entire caravan to be treading on air.

Finally the river opened out into a broad estuary, half a mile to a mile wide, and very soon both banks disappeared, and before us stretched the immense blue-green lake of Selling-tso. Here the banks were not more than four inches high, and the mud came up level with the top of them. The river was grey and muddy, and contrasted sharply against the beautifully clear, and undoubtedly salt, water of the lake. This last was, however, at first so shallow that we were forced to make a long detour before we could reach the north-west shore, where some of our men were waiting for us with horses. At the same time the wind blew so crisply from the south that the surface of the lake was ruffled all over with white-crested, curling wavelets. We found it advisable to take off our boots and haul the skiff up into a creek, and an hour later we were comfortably settled in our new camp.

The caravan also had had a good day, although the Tibetans had been annoying. Twice the Cossacks rode up to tents near the line of march for the purpose of buying provisions, but the scouts hurried there before them, and forbad the people to trade. On another occasion they met a caravan of 200 sheep laden with salt, and were negotiating with the owners when the Tibetan captain rode up and in a tone of authority absolutely forbad his countrymen to sell them anything. The Cossacks, who were more hot-headed than I am, instructed the Lama to tell the Tibetans that if they only pursued us for the purpose of preventing us from procuring supplies, they had better keep

Tent of a Tibetan Nomad in a Recess of the Mountain.

out of range, for they would be instantly shot down. After that they did not show themselves again for the rest of the day. Thus the caravan was able without further hindrance to approach three tents and encamp beside them. The occupants, twelve in number, were very open-hearted, and readily sold us a sheep, some milk, butter and fat. Evidently the curmudgeon of a chief, who thought he could starve us out of the country, had not been near them. Later on these people paid a visit to our encampment, and were regaled with tea and bread and tobacco, and we also gave them a number of small presents, including a couple of knives, a compass, and two pieces of cloth, with which they were perfectly enraptured. They called the locality Shannig-nagbo, or the "Black Cap."

Here we rested one day. I thought it wise to take advantage of the opportunity, and early in the morning bought several sheep; but I was only just in time, for at nine o'clock there arrived a troop of something like 50 horsemen, who proceeded to put up two tents, with blue domes, a mile or so away. About an hour after noon they sent a message to us, and our Lama went out and talked to them about half-way between the two camps. In reply to their message, I said that, if their most distinguished chief did not wait upon me personally, I should positively decline to have anything to say to them. After that the man did put in an appearance, followed by ten soldiers carrying swords. But we had the utmost difficulty in inducing him to enter our kitchen-tent, where tea, bread, and tobacco were set out on a stool. The Tibetans declined, however, to touch what we offered them. I suppose they thought it was not right to accept anything from people who were travelling through their country without permission.

Then began the usual fruitless discussion. The old chief, who was really a very nice, modest old gentleman, with a pleasing countenance and sincere style of speech, begged that we would stay where we were at least four days, whilst he sent a special messenger to Lassa to get instructions from the Devashung, or Holy Council. I told him we had not time to wait, and intended resuming our journey again next morning.

"Then we shall follow you," he said, "and stop you from going to Lassa. We shall soon be reinforced."

"If you do stop us," I replied, "you will have to shoot; but remember that we also have fire-arms."

Then the honest old fellow shook his head, and declared that they never thought of shooting, and he added that such hard words ought not to be exchanged between us. I offered him two or three presents, but he declined them, saying, "If you will only wait four days, I shall have great pleasure in accepting your gifts, and I will give you others in exchange for them; besides, I will procure you whatever supplies you want, as well as caravan animals to take you to Ladak."

In the afternoon Kalpet came to me snivelling and complained that one of the men had beaten him. I enquired into the matter, and warned the other men to be kind to him, and enjoined Chernoff, who was head-man of the caravan, to look specially after him. I was really very sorry for the man, for I never saw a creature more utterly forlorn. I shall never forget

the look of hopeless depression that sat upon his features when he came to me, nor the way his eyes lighted up when I took his part, and gave him drugs from my medicine-chest. When I went to see him later on, he was eating the national rice-pudding with a good appetite, so that I concluded he was only suffering from a passing attack of mountain-sickness.

CHAPTER XXVII.

DEATH AND BURIAL OF KALPET.

WHEN on the 7th September we started from Camp no. LXXV. and the steppes of the "Black Cap," one of our camels, a veteran from Kashgar, which had accompanied me on several of my desert journeys, was no longer able to rise, and had to be killed and abandoned. When the caravan was all loaded up, the Bombo came and made a last desperate attempt to induce us to stay where we were. But when I told him curtly that our road led to the south, he said no more and went away.

We followed the shore of Selling-tso west-south-west, the surface being hard and level. On our right was a steep ridge, and along its foot rode the Tibetans, now over 60 in number. A troop of two score antelopes fled at our approach; and just when the lake appeared to terminate, we rode into some excellent grass, thick, sappy and a foot high; we at once stopped to let the animals graze a little. Thereupon down galloped the Tibetans. Then they dismounted, unsaddled, and turned their horses adrift. Up went their tents, and in a very short space their fires indicated that they were getting their breakfast ready.

Then, leaving our outwitted pursuers behind us, we struck away from the lake and travelled south-west across four ancient beach-lines, each most distinctly marked by an immense ridge of gravel, the last and highest of them being more than 160 feet above the existing level of the lake. Selling-tso is thus rapidly drying up. After that we travelled along tolerably level ground for some time, until we reached a fresh ridge which dipped north-west towards another lake. Here we found ourselves on the edge of a very remarkable depression, elliptical in shape, with pools of fresh water in the middle, and a flock of sheep grazing round a solitary tent. Immediately to the south was a steep ridge, stretching from east to west, and some 500 or 600 feet high. As we were making for its western

end, eight Tibetans suddenly made their appearance on a hill, and sat watching us. But when shortly afterwards they disappeared, it struck us that we must be on a peninsula; evidently they felt sure of us for some little time to come at any rate. Thereupon I sent on Sirkin and Shagdur to reconnoitre, whilst we followed slowly after them. When they turned back and met us, they told us that the two lakes were in reality one, and that we were in fact on a peninsula which turned its broad, steep brow to the south. We therefore turned back to the north-north-east.

We encamped near a little tented village on the shore at a

Kalpet's Bed on the Back of a Camel.

place called Tang-leh, the people of which were very friendly, though they stubbornly refused to sell us anything. Thereupon I showed them four bladders of lard, which Cherdon had found in a crevice of the rock, though he left six others behind him, and asked them what was the price of them. "Three *tsos** each," they answered; but as the price was too high, we let them keep their lard, though the Lama observed, by way of a parting shot, that if we had been less pleasant people, we might quite easily have taken the whole ten bladders, and they been none the wiser.

The Tibetans encamped about a mile from us, with the

* The tso, about 7½*d.*, is the current silver coin of Lassa.

exception of 15 men, who came and put up their tents close beside ours. It rained fast almost all day long, and two or three times the westerly squalls were so violent that we were forced to stop and wait until they passed over. In spite of the rain, however, the Tibetans went through various manœuvres and warlike games on horseback, and then tested their marksmanship.

Kalpet was a good deal worse, and had to be tied on his horse to prevent him from falling off. Chernoff was his nurse, and rode by his side. Next morning the sick man besought us to leave him behind, a request which we did not of course comply with. Instead of that we transferred him to the back of a camel, making him as comfortable as we could with felts and cushions.

Had it not been blowing so smartly, I should have preferred to cross the lake in the skiff; but as it was, I was constrained to accompany the caravan along the northern shore, which stretched in a pretty straight line to the west. As soon as we began to load up, the Tibetans also set about striking camp, and when we were a mile or two on the road, the old Bombo, with 12 men, rode up to us, and made yet another attempt to induce us to travel straight to Ladak. But when I told him I should go which way I pleased, and was not to be frightened by him and all his soldiers, he appeared very much dejected, and announced that he should leave us to our fate, and go home to his own tents. I heartily wished him a successful journey; and the whole troop then disappeared, and we had the rare pleasure of being left in peace for the rest of the day. However, well on in the afternoon, two horsemen, evidently scouts, turned up in the distance, though they soon disappeared again amongst the hills. Here again the ancient beach-lines were distinctly marked; you could in places ride along them for hours together. The lake extended a very long way to the south, and then turned to the south-west and south-south-west. Here there were a great number of mud islands, and the water between them was fresh, indicating that a river entered the lake somewhere close by. This we very soon reached, and Shagdur quickly found an excellent ford, with a hard, gravelly bottom. The water was as clear as crystal; consequently the river must issue from another lake higher up the valley. Shagdur, whilst out reconnoitring, shot four wild-duck, and here they came floating down the river. We picked them up; but two others, which were only wounded, managed to struggle past us. Cherdon,

Tibetan Marksmen.

Charge of the Tibetans at Yaggyu-rapga.

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daring and reckless, rode straight into the river after one of them, and cut its head off with his sabre. The other, however, disappeared among the flocks of gulls, which dotted the waters of the estuary in vast numbers. Their presence seemed to point to fish; and as the spot was in every way too inviting to be passed, we pitched our tents on the summit of the right bank.

No sooner was the camp arranged than two black lines appeared advancing rapidly from the north-west and the north-east; they were the troublesome and pertinacious Tibetans, 53 from the former direction and 13 from the latter, and they were leading after them a large number of pack-horses. They had clearly been to fetch fresh supplies of food, and to equip themselves for a longer campaign. Crossing the river by the same ford that we did, they galloped past our camp at full speed, some in front of the tents, others behind them and between them, as though they intended to annihilate us in one tremendous charge. As they rode they whooped and flourished their hands above their heads, but to us they paid not the slightest regard. They did not even bestow upon us so much as a single glance, as they raced through us like a whirlwind. And yet they were very picturesque in their variegated attire and white hats, their ornamental saddles, silver-mounted scabbards, and red flags fluttering from the forked rests of their muskets. Immediately beyond us they halted and held a long palaver, gathering in three groups round their leaders, who appeared to be instructing them how to use their weapons. Every now and again there came a peculiar whoop, like a word of command. Then finally they ran up their tents and lit their fires.

The Tibetans pitched their camp on a gentle rise completely commanding our tents, and the Cossacks noticed that at dusk they planted all their muskets in a line, with the muzzles pointing in our direction. We wondered if they meant to open a fusillade upon us during the night. As soon as it was dark, therefore, I took Shagdur and the Lama with me, and we went to the Bombo's tent, where I received a polite welcome, and was invited to partake of tea and tsamba. Within one minute the tent was packed full of Tibetans. I declined his refreshments because he had not accepted those I offered to him. "Reh! reh! reh!" (true! true! true!) he exclaimed. He then asked me what my name was. I replied that if he would tell me what the river was called he should know my name; but he scorned the

transaction. Later on, however, we learnt that it was the Yaggyu-rapga. In answer to my question, whether it contained any fish, he answered, "Yes, plenty." I promised, therefore, to remain where we were over the next day, on condition that they, as a proof of their assertion, delivered at my tent at daybreak a moderate-sized fish. They promised to do their best, and borrowed a net from us, though they had, of course, no more idea how to use it than a baby.

At daybreak next morning there appeared at my tent door some of the Tibetans carrying the net, with a little mountain *asman* (fish) fast in its meshes. They were immensely proud of their capture, and declared it had nearly cost them their lives. Some of our own watchmen had, however, seen the Tibetans go down to the river at daybreak, where, waiting until they saw a gull in a favourable position, they threw stones at it just after it had swallowed a fish, and so forced it to disgorge. However we stayed the day there, as we had promised to do, but it was to fish.

Leaving Cherdon and all the Mussulmans, except two, to guard the camp, I and the other three Cossacks, with Kutchuk and Ördek, our experienced Lop fishermen, went to try our luck. Loading the skiff on a camel, we rode, followed by a crowd of Tibetans, up the right bank, till we came to a bend in the river, where there were two cataracts, one three or four feet high, the other just about one foot. At this spot the channel was narrow, being forced across and between sills of clay, mud, and gravel-and-shingle, and the water deep and of a blue-black colour. Here in a gentle eddy, just below the lower cataract, we put down our net; then launching the boat, we paddled round it in a sweeping curve, and beating the water with the paddles, frightened the fish into the meshes. In this way we caught two or three fish at each haul. After catching 28 I went away, leaving the others to continue the sport. Meanwhile the Cossacks angled from the banks, and they, too, were successful. Chernoff also shot a couple of wild duck, which we retrieved with the skiff. In a word, we had a most delightful day, a welcome break to the long, tiring marches of the caravan. Although it often hailed smartly, the squalls in no way inconvenienced us. The Tibetans sat all along the bank watching us, and, black as they were, looked like a string of crows on a barn roof. Taking Ördek with me in the skiff, we drifted at a rattling pace down to the Selling-tso. Here I got out and

Our Camp at Yaggyu-rapga. In the front line Vanka the Ram, and the Dogs Yollbars, Malchik and Hamra.

walked home, leaving Ördek to paddle and punt the skiff back to camp. We measured the river, however, and found its volume was 1,222 cubic feet in the second.

That evening the Bombo and 30 Tibetans came to visit me in my tent, bringing with them two sheep and three pails of beautiful milk, a reward, no doubt, for our having stayed the day over as they begged us. We let them listen to the musical-box, and see several of our "sights," and the Bombo now condescended to accept the presents I offered him. Meanwhile the Cossacks were looking on at the Tibetans shooting. The distance was not more than 45 yards, and the target was a little piece of wood fastened to a stake; but out of 30 marksmen not more than three hit the target. The Cossacks then offered to try; but the Tibetans refused to allow them, and for a very good reason. That day we had fish for dinner, to everybody's satisfaction. The Tibetans have no taste for delicacies. "Eat fish!" they cried. "You might just as well eat lizards and worms! They are all the same sort of thing."

When I awoke next morning, the Lop-men had already been out fishing; so that I was able to breakfast off fish instead of roast duck, as I had intended. The morning promised well, being bright and sunny; but very soon after we started the heavy banks of cloud, which hung on the horizon, advanced to meet us, and finally shook out their contents over us. It hailed, it rained, it turned raw and cold, and the ground became wet and slippery. Nor was that the only thing which depressed our spirits that day. The Tibetans were very tiring with their perpetual insistence that we should turn back. Besides that, our two invalids were rapidly getting into a serious condition. Kalpet, in particular, was very much worse.

The mountain-chain which ran south of the Yaggyu-rapga, was cleft by a natural and imposing rocky defile; and through it we penetrated to the south-east, the cliffs on each side of the defile being vertical and sharply outlined. Above them on the right circled a royal eagle, probably the same we had seen the day before preying upon the wild geese; but the pretty rock-pigeons hopped about on the ground without the least fear. Kulans and orongo antelopes were very common; and, like the fish, they appeared never to have been disturbed by man. The eastern extremity of the mountain-chain projected like a peninsula into the lake. At its southern foot we forded a large river called the Alla-sangpo, and then had once more on our left

the light blue waters of the Selling-tso. Every now and again we caught glimpses of a labyrinth of mountains in the south-west; though for the greater part of the time it rained and hailed so incessantly that it was almost as dim as twilight, and I had to steer our course entirely by the compass. The country was like one boundless marsh. The Tibetans chose another route, and we finally thought it advisable to follow them. But when we did they stopped, thinking, no doubt, "Oh, they may just help themselves!" Once it cleared for a few minutes, sufficiently to let us obtain a view of the broad bosom of the lake, with a few scattered tents beside it, and big flocks of wild geese along the beach. We recognised again several features which we had passed on the opposite shore, especially the little range of hills on the peninsula that we traversed by mistake.

We were just on the point of turning towards a saddle in the south-south-east, when Kutchuk and Khodai Kullu came riding back to tell me, breathlessly, that Kalpet was a good deal worse. I hurried on and found him lying on a carpet on the ground, with the other men gathered round him. He was more dead than alive, and gasped for water; but as we had none near at hand, we offered him milk, and let him drink all he wanted. His face was a sickly yellow, his lips white, and his eyes glittered, though they wore, at the same time, a glazed expression. It was raining fast when we encamped beside a big pool of rain-water. One of the tents was converted into a hospital, and inside it we made Kalpet comfortable. He lay perfectly still, without appearing to suffer any pain. I gave him a small dose of morphia to help him to sleep. The old man, Mohammed Tokta, who was also placed in the hospital, was suffering from some ugly disease. His body was blown up and his face swollen; nor was he made any better through witnessing his unfortunate comrade's struggle with death.

That evening our friend the Bombo again came to visit us, and when we requested him to procure us some milk from the nearest nomad encampment, he replied that small-pox was raging there, and we might go and get it if we liked, but he, for his part, distinctly declined to do so. This time he brought with him three new individuals, amongst them a very funny old lama. The newcomers said that they came direct from the special emissaries whom the Dalai Lama was sending to prevent us from going to Lassa. And then began the usual prayers and entreaties that we would not advance farther, and so bring mis-

fortune both upon them and upon ourselves. The emissaries from Lassa were not very far away; in fact, we might expect their arrival within two days. But I was immovable; I said it was shameful to treat peaceful visitors in that way, and invest us with hundreds of soldiers, armed to the teeth. We were not come to wage war upon them, and had honestly paid for everything we took. But I refused to give them any clue to my plans before the emissaries arrived. At this they were greatly chopfallen, and looked quite distressed.

Just at seven o'clock a squall came on, of so furious a character that the tents threatened to collapse under the weight

Our Hospital.

of the rain and the hail, and everything that was lying loose about the camp went whirling aloft. The Tibetans happened to be on their way back to their own tents, and so got another cold douche in addition to the one I had given them. When I made my last visit to the hospital that night, Kalpet was sleeping quietly; but Mohammed Tokta complained of his heart. The first thing I did when I rose on the 11th September was to visit the two invalids again. Mohammed Tokta was just the same, clear and sensible, sometimes even "joky"; but he told me he was gradually losing feeling in his fingers. Kalpet, however, was in a much worse condition. He had difficulty in breathing, his cheeks were hollow, though his eyes still retained their

glitter. To me it seemed as if he could not last much longer; but he talked sensibly, and said it was a *kattik kessel* (hard sickness) he had got, and that he had been a good deal worse ever since he was beaten by one of his comrades some days ago. As a matter of fact, it had been nothing worth speaking about, although the mind of the dying man had seized upon it, and he could talk about nothing else. The unfortunate man who had the blow upon his conscience would have given a good deal to have undone it. Gradually Kalpet's consciousness left him; he no longer talked, but lay and stared straight before him, oblivious of everything that went on around him. I was thinking of staying another day; but it was such a disagreeable place that all the men voted for going on. We therefore made a soft, comfortable bed for Kalpet on his camel, and once more got under way. All the men knew we had death with us in the caravan, and consequently our spirits were depressed and gloomy. Travelling south-east, we perceived, from the first low saddle we crossed, a lovely lake, with ragged shores, embedded amongst low mountain ranges. Its water was as bright as crystal, and the aquatic plants and fish in it showed at once that its water was fresh, and consequently it could not be the Selling-tso. As, however, its western shore looked difficult, because of the steep rocks which lined it, I thought it best to send Sirkin and Shagdur on to reconnoitre. Whilst we were waiting, there came on a violent squall of hail, and we threw a felt rug over Kalpet to protect him. The three Tibetans who had recently arrived now rode up and assured me that there was no road along the west side of the lake; but if we insisted upon continuing there was a path along the northern shore, leading to the east. I suspected some trick, but did not very well see how I was to help myself, especially after the Cossacks came and confirmed what the Tibetans said.

We accordingly continued our way along the northern shore by what proved to be a decidedly zigzag route. There was, indeed, a trail behind the hills leading due east; but the Tibetans kept all the time behind us, and never showed us where it was. Hence we doubled the head of every creek and circled round every promontory and peninsula, without knowing in which direction the lake trended. In this way, although we took many unnecessary steps, I had the opportunity to obtain a detailed map of the capricious outline of the lake. We never saw more beautiful scenery in all Tibet: the creeks and fjords

Kalpet lying Dead on his Bier.

cut deeply into the land in every direction, penetrating the low, picturesque, and rugged mountains which shot abruptly down into the lake. At intervals there were small islands, knobbed like the backs of dolphins. Here there were no ancient beach lines; the freshness of the water suggested that this lake, Nakktsong-tso, as it was called, discharged into some other salt lake situated still farther to the south. Some of the creeks were semicircular in outline, and the lake lapped very pleasantly amongst the water-worn gravel which littered their shores.

After wandering about in this way for two or three hours,

The Funeral Procession.

we suddenly came upon the Tibetans, who had pitched their camp on the shore, and were making their usual halt for tea. They had gained upon us by taking the short cut behind the hills. We went on past them, and continued until the lake definitely swung away to the south-east. There the mountains also retreated from the lake, leaving a broad, level expanse of hard gravel. We terminated the day's march beside a group of tents at the east end of the lake, and there we again found the Tibetans, they having once more slipped past us, and their tents were already up.

Kalpet had spoken several times on the march, calling particularly for Rosi Mollah, his fellow-townsman from Keriya.

He had asked for water; he had asked to be turned over when he got tired of lying in one position. He had cried out loudly and distinctly that the camel was going too fast; but for some little time before we approached the end of the march he was silent. At last the men stopped his camel, and the Mollah listened. Then he rode on to fetch me. There was no longer any doubt; my poor servant had ceased to breathe. His features were calm, and his eyes had lost their glitter. In fact, he was already cold, although it was scarcely an hour since he last asked for water. The Mollah closed his eyes and we went on again. The Mussulmans had as usual sung to relieve the monotony of the march; but now they plodded on as silent as the grave, and nothing was heard save the footsteps of the animals as they tramped along the sand and gravel of the lake-side and the weary breathing of the camels. The caravan was converted into a funeral procession, the dead being borne on a living catafalque.

When we passed the Tibetans' tents, some of them came to meet us, and said we should have a long way to go to reach the next pasture. I told them we had a dead man with us, and must bury him in the ground. They received the intelligence quite calmly, and pointed out the best place for a grave.

As soon as the tents were erected, I consulted the Mollah and Turdu Bai with regard to the burial. They proposed that it should be put off till the next morning, and should then take place with the customary ceremonies. The body was left all night in the white tent, being watched by one of the men. The next morning, the 12th September, was gloriously bright and fine; only occasionally did a light, fleecy cloud drift across the sky, and a fresh breeze ruffled the surface of the lake. The grave was already dug, and Hamra Kul, Mollah Shah, and Ördek were swathing the body in a sheet after duly washing it. Their faces, with the exception of their eyes, were covered with white bandages to prevent them from inhaling the smell of the dead. Outside the tent sat Rosi Mollah, reading aloud from a prayer-book. The grave was only about three feet deep, with a kind of shelf on one side of it for the body. Then the funeral procession started, Kalpet being wrapped in a white felt, and borne on a camel's pack-saddle by Mollah Shah, Islam, Li Loyeh, Khodai Kallu, Ördek, Hamra Kul, and Kutchuk. Putting down the bier by the graveside, they lowered Kalpet cautiously into his final resting-place. Mollah Shah and the Mollah stepped

Kalpet's Grave.

down into the grave to put the finishing touches to the corpse as it lay on the shelf; then the Mollah addressed a few words to the departed, saying, "You have been an honest and faithful Mussulman. You have never done any of us any wrong. We miss you greatly. We bewail your loss. You have been a good and faithful servant to Tura (*i.e.* the author)."

After the two men stepped out of the grave, the pack-saddle was placed across it and covered with a felt carpet, the corners of which were kept in place by clods of earth. Then they piled the soil on the top of the carpet. The first rain, or the first wandering yak which chanced to come that way, would of course cause it to collapse. When the mound was completed, and a monument put up at its head, consisting of turves with stones on the top of them, the Mussulmans kneeled down round the grave, and, putting their hands before their faces, prayed silently, while the Mollah repeated certain forms of prayer for the dead. The spot where Kalpet was buried is marked on my map with a black cross. The mound is by this, no doubt, levelled down, and the flocks and herds of the nomads wander across it, while the wolves howl in the mountains in the dreary winter nights.

After the burial Rosi Mollah came to me and said, "Before we separate at the end of the journey, will you please give me a certificate, to the effect that Kalpet died a natural death, so that his brother in Keriya may not think that I or any of the others slew him." This I promised to do, and did do later on, as well as sent Kalpet's wages to his brother.

The Tibetans, who had been spectators of the burial, observed that we took a great deal of unnecessary trouble about it. "Why don't you fling the corpse out to the wolves and ravens?" they said, that being their own practice, as we witnessed on a subsequent occasion. The Mussulmans then burnt the tent in which Kalpet's dead body had lain, as well as his clothes and boots. In his case all the customary observances of the funeral were duly carried out; whereas when Aldat died he was buried simply as he was.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE EMISSARIES FROM LASSA.

THE day which followed this sad opening turned out bright and smiling, and the earth upon which men lead such a fugitive and uncertain existence again unfolded before us one of its most beautiful scenes. Once more we passed through a rocky defile or gateway, catching on our left yet another glimpse of the Selling-tso, and beheld from the crest of the low pass a wide expanse of open country, bounded in the extreme distance by mountains. Thence we directed our course due south, the Tibetans still hanging upon our rear. On the left of our route were some black tents, as well as two white and blue ones. Thither our self-constituted escort betook themselves, and as we in our turn approached them, a troop of horsemen galloped out and announced that two high dignitaries had arrived from Lassa, and begged us to stop, as they wished to have an interview with us. At first I refused, and said we had nothing to do with these emissaries, and would continue. But upon observing the large numbers of men who were riding about the tents, and reflecting that they came direct from Lassa, I thought it on the whole more prudent to stop, and at least hear what they wanted. Accordingly I begged the Tibetans to tell their chiefs that I would speak with them if they would come to me.

Shortly after this two elderly men in red robes approached on horseback, each horse being led by four attendants on foot. Stopping, but without dismounting, they greeted me politely. They looked quite friendly and good-natured; presumably the reports which they had heard of us during the last few days had been satisfactory. They said they had very important communications to make to me, and I positively must pitch my tents near theirs. To this, after raising a good many objections, I finally assented. Then they turned round and rode back to their own tents.

After waiting a long time for them to return, I sent our Lama to them to say that it was *they* who had requested us to stop,

and if they really had anything important to say to me they had better make haste, or we should continue our journey. This stirred them up. Their camp was all commotion. The two emissaries hurried out, mounted, and rode towards us—the distance was only about 150 yards. For safety's sake they were surrounded by a strong escort, armed with swords, though they left their firearms behind them. Dismounting, they again greeted me politely, and stepped into our kitchen-tent, which on such occasions was generally cleared and brightened up with a variegated Khotan carpet. Upon this I and the two emissaries took our places, while the Cossacks, Tibetans, and Mohammedans formed tightly-packed rings all round outside. Our Lama, who acted as my interpreter, took his seat between us.

The elder of the two emissaries was called Hlajeh Tsering; the younger, Yunduk Tsering. They announced that they were members of the Devashung, or Holy Council, of Lassa, and had been sent by it to prevent me from going to that city. They knew I had already tried to get there another way with two companions, but had been stopped and conducted back across the frontier by Kamba Bombo's men; and their language was now precisely the same as Kamba Bombo had used. "You shall not advance another foot to the south," and for three long mortal hours this ultimatum was repeated in every possible variation. "We have millions of soldiers," said Yunduk Tsering, "and we shall prevent you." I asked them what they would do if we persisted in advancing in spite of them. They answered, "Either you or we will lose our heads. In our instructions it runs that we shall have our heads cut off if we let you go on. The whole country is full of soldiers." As far as our heads were concerned, I begged them to be under no apprehension; they could not touch us, partly because we had the assistance of higher powers, partly because we were armed with terrible weapons of destruction.

Both emissaries were greatly excited; they shouted and gesticulated, and got very hot; and when I, in spite of that, kept cool and quiet, and answered their threats with a dry laugh, they were ready to burst with indignation. "Kari-sari" (What does he say?), they asked incessantly. "He says he means to go south." "Mig yori" (if he has eyes), they shouted, "he shall see to-morrow how we will stop his caravan." "Mig yori! mig yori!" was incessantly on their lips, but I simply laughed and repeated after them, "Mig yori. To-morrow, when we march south,

see to it that your muskets shoot straight, for by heaven you shall have a hot time of it!" Then they tried a new tack, and in pathetic tones earnestly besought me not to advance any farther. If we would only go back the same way we had come, they would procure us guides, and provisions, and everything else we wanted —in fact, all would then be well.

Now I had no intention of pushing matters to extremes; in fact, I had had enough of Tibet, and was now only anxious to reach Ladak, or rather, let me say, home—I mean my Swedish home by the waters of the Skrägård. But not to throw up the game too suddenly, I once more told them all their attempts were in vain—I was determined to go on. "Very well, then," they said—"very well, we will not shoot you and your men, but all the same we shall render it impossible for you to advance."

"How shall you manage that?"

"Ten or twenty of our soldiers will hold fast each of your men, and ten or twenty more will hold each camel, and we will hold them until they cannot stand."

"And what if we shoot you?"

"It will make no difference; we shall be killed all the same if we let you go on. We have received special orders from Lassa."

"Show me your orders, and I will stop."

"Willingly," they cried, and at once sent for the paper from their tents.

The document, which was a remarkable despatch, was read aloud by Yunduk Tsering, our Lama reading over his shoulder to check him. After the missive had been read aloud and translated once, we went through it again, slowly, paragraph by paragraph, whilst I wrote it down in Mongolian, with Latin lettering. The address on the outside of the folded document was this:

"In the year of the Iron Cow, the 6th month, the 21st day. This writing for the hands of the two governors of Nakktsong. It is from the Devashung, and is sent by post. It must be in their hands the 7th month, the 22nd day."

And then followed the document itself:—"In the year of the Iron Cow, the 6th month, the 19th day, there arrived from the governor of Nakkchu a writing (to the effect) that Lama Sanjeh, secretary of the Mongol Tsangeh Khutuktu, besides several pilgrims, were making a pilgrimage to Jo-mitsing in Hamdung, and that he, together with Tugden Darjeh, made certain communications to the governor of Nakkchu (that is, Kamba Bombo).

"The governor of Nakkchu has communicated the said in-

telligence to the Devashung. Tsangeh's secretary said, when he was setting out on his journey, he saw European men, and travelled in their company a piece. After they bought a quantity of clothing, they travelled on further. In the bazaar he saw two Russian men. 'Where travel you to?' he asked them. 'Are you lamas?' 'We are lamas,' they answered. The Khalkha Mongol, Shereb Lama, the healer, was in their company, and guided them. On the road he saw six Russian men travelling. A large number of camels and other men were also on the road.

"Let writings be sent with haste to Namru and Nakktsong, that it may be everywhere known that from Nakkchu inwards, for as far as my (*i.e.*, the Dalai Lama's) kingdom extends, Russian (European) men cannot have permission to travel south. Writings must be despatched to all the chiefs. Watch the frontiers of Nakktsong. It is necessary to watch the country closely bit by bit.* It is positively unnecessary that European men come into the Land of the Holy Books to spy around it. They have nothing whatever to do in the province which obeys you both. If they say it is necessary (know) that these two chiefs must not travel south. Compel them to turn and go back the way they came."

This missive cleared up certain points which had hitherto been obscure. Lama Sanjeh and Tugden Darjeh belonged to the caravan of Mongol pilgrims who passed through Charkhlik in May, 1900. Before that they had met with my two Buriat Cossacks and Shereb Lama in Korla and Kara-shahr, and the information which they had given, and which was embodied in the document, was in the main true. By "a large number of camels and other men" was meant our big caravan under Chernoff and Turdu Bai.

As soon as they reached Nakkchu, they told Kamba Bombo what they had seen, and the latter at once despatched a courier to the Devashung at Lassa. The messenger reached Lassa on the 19th of the 6th month, and on the 21st the fiery cross was speeding through the country north and west of the capital, especially through the provinces of Namru and Nakktsong, bidding the Tibetans maintain vigilant watch, and prevent any and every European from penetrating into the country. The

* This passage runs thus in Mongolian:—"Nakktsäng-tsonguin tsakhar hara, gadser gadser sän harreha kerekteh." The province is thus called Nakktsäng-tsong; but the name we always heard used was Nakktsong, just as the lake was always called Nakktsong-tso.

words "the province which obeys you both" proved that the document which had just been read to me was especially directed to the two emissaries who stopped us at Nakktsong-tso, and who were clearly the governors of Namru and Nakktsong respectively. From other information which we received it appeared that at the time when Kamba Bombo's report reached Lassa these two men happened to be in the capital, and their instructions were handed to them in person. Thus they were in possession of a number of details with regard to my dash for Lassa, and the way in which we had been stopped by Kamba Bombo. By "these two chiefs" were undoubtedly meant Sirkin and Chernoff, for when we were stopped by Kamba Bombo's men, we told them we had left two Europeans in our main camp, who would exact vengeance upon them if any harm happened to us. It was as we feared; the Mongol (Turgut) pilgrims had played us a dirty trick, though even without their tattling we should not have succeeded, for both Kamba Bombo and Hlajeh Tsering told us, they had received several independent reports from yak-hunters who had seen us.

In reply to this, all I could say was that I acknowledged the document, and that they were perfectly right to prevent us from going further, and I honestly told them that the policy of isolation which they were pursuing was the only means by which they could preserve their country from destruction. "All round Tibet," I said, "north, south, and west, Europeans have either conquered your neighbours or made them subject to themselves, and the same process has now begun in China. Your country is the only one in Asia which still preserves its independence intact." "Reh! reh!" they answered, "that is precisely how we wish it to remain! We are very sorry for you, that you cannot go to Lassa, but we must obey orders. So far as we are concerned, we should have been far better pleased if we had been ordered to accompany you to Lassa, and there show you all there is to be seen."

With the view of clearing up the situation, I asked them if they had any objection to send my Chinese pass to Lassa and wait with me for a reply. They said, "We cannot do it at any price, and for two reasons. In the first place, the Emperor of China exercises no authority whatever in our country, and in the second place the Devashung would suspect us of acting in your interests, and the least we could expect would be that we should be deposed from office."

Hlajeh Tsering Smoking his Pipe.

Shereb Lama's name was mentioned in the document, and here they had him before them in the flesh. They told him that if it had not been for my sake they would have seized him and handed him over to the authorities in Lassa, who would have inflicted upon him the punishment he so richly deserved for having guided a European towards Lassa. His name was now in very evil repute in the Holy City; it was written down in the "book of the suspect." It would be best for him if he never showed himself in the Holy City again; and with magisterial authority they laid down the law strongly to our poor Lama. But he, now that the die was cast, spoke out boldly and without reserve, abusing

Hlajeh Tsering and Yunduk Tsering.

the two emissaries unsparingly, and asking by what right they dared to use such language towards a lama who was not a Tibetan subject. He had received permission from the Chinese governor of Kara-shahr to accompany me, and also the consent of the prior of the monastery there; and when he returned he would tell them how he had been treated. As the quarrel looked like ending in blows, I produced the big musical-box, and, with the help of its soothing strains, reduced their discordant feelings to harmony.

Hlajeh Tsering was, however, the beau ideal of a gentleman, the perfect picture of a good-natured, indulgent, easy-going, favourite old uncle. Every member of our caravan, not excluding the Lama, was perfectly enchanted with him. I hope

nobody will take exception to the phrase, if I say that he was far more like a wrinkled old woman than the distinguished governor of a province. Just look at the portrait of him which I drew (p. 457). His perfectly hairless face, the manner in which he wore his hair, his pig-tail, his head-attire, with its button of authority, his long ear-rings—all contributed to give him such a decidedly feminine appearance, that I asked him in all seriousness whether he really was not an old woman. This insinuation, which would have seriously offended any other man, seemed, on the contrary, rather to tickle Hlajeh Tsering, for he smiled mischievously, nodded, and twisted his parchment face into the most comical grimaces, put his hand before his eyes, and ended by laughing until the tears ran down his cheeks. "No!" he assured me, he was not an old woman, he was a man.

At seven o'clock that evening I, accompanied by Shagdur and the Lama, visited Hlajeh Tsering, in his tent, and stayed until midnight. This time we no longer discussed business, but laughed and talked and jested like a couple of students. Amongst other things we boasted of our weapons, and I proposed to try Shagdur's sabre against a Tibetan sword. After the trial the latter was gapped like a saw, though subsequently we found that the Tibetans did possess several swords made of excellent steel. Hlajeh Tsering also showed me two or three exceedingly useful revolvers which he possessed.

His white tent, with blue stripes and bordering, was neatly and tidily furnished. At the farther short end was a kind of low divan, made of cushions and bolsters, and in front of it stood a low table, upon which we were served with tea, sour milk, and tsamba. On the right-hand side of the divan, when you sat upon it, stood a small moveable shrine, with various *burkhans* (images of Buddha), gilded, and in part swathed in *haddiks* (scarves of honour), amongst them being the *burkhan* of the Dalai Lama. Two or three oil lamps were burning in front of it, and beside them were small trays of brass, containing various kinds of light refreshments, which were offered to the images, as is the custom in all the big temples. No sooner did any of us take a sip of tea than, hey presto! a servant ran forward and filled the cup up again, even though it would hold no more than ten or a dozen drops. Hlajeh Tsering had a special attendant to look after his pipes. His favourite was a long Chinese pipe, and when I gave him a tinful of my tobacco he was perfectly enchanted with it.

Yunduk Tsering, a man of about 45, was less endowed with intelligence. It was he who thought he could frighten me with big words, by dishing up his innumerable multitudes, and counting his soldiers by millions. I never had the least desire to become involved in hostilities with them, for I had only four Cossacks, and, as will readily be understood, I had neither the right nor the wish to use violence. If we had been so rash as to embark on any such mad and reprehensible undertaking, it would have been the easiest thing in the world for the Tibetans, with their immense superiority in numbers, to have entrapped us in some pass, and annihilated us. But the Czar had not lent me his

Hlajeh Tsering and Yunduk Tsering.

Cossacks for the purpose of creating disturbances in Tibet, but simply to serve as a guard for my own personal protection. Hence it was a point of honour with me to take them home, and return them to their quarters, as sound and uninjured as when they joined me. Yunduk Tsering, therefore, corpulent and bloated as he was, was not only slenderly equipped with brains, but I will even call him silly. In the course of our numerous discussions and disputes, he used repeatedly to draw his hand edge-wise across his throat, by way of illustrating what would happen to us if we persisted in pressing further to the south. He tried my patience to such a degree, that at last I called him point blank " a silly ass " !

Both emissaries were neatly and elegantly attired, and brought several different suits with them; some warm, some light, some intended for state occasions, and others suitable for everyday wear. The style was Chinese, that is to say, tunics and jackets or vests of silk or wool. The illustrations on pp. 459 and 461 show them dressed in gala attire.

CHAPTER XXIX.

THE NAKKTSONG–TSO.

On the 14th September I left the camp, and began one of the most glorious lake-trips it has ever been my lot to make. Taking Kutchuk with me, and the skiff on a camel, I rode west to the shore of the adjacent lake of Nakktsong-tso. Strange to say, the Tibetans did not molest me; but then I had told them I was only going fishing. I left orders with the caravan to stay where they were that day, and on the following morning to proceed to the west side of the lake, and there wait for me at the spot where we had been turned back two or three days before.

Fifty-two degrees west of south there was a little rocky islet peeping above the blue waters of the lake. Towards it we directed our course, and it took us several hours to get there. The lake appeared to extend a long way in front of us. But I enjoyed the magnificent views, the lap-lapping of the bright, rippling water against the skiff, the beautiful weather, bright, cheerful, and warm (14°.2 C., or 57°.6 Fahr.); but even more enjoyable than these was the consciousness that I was safe from the amiable inquisitiveness and touching solicitude of the Tibetans as to the direction in which we intended to travel. The maximum depth along the line we took was 41½ feet.

The little crag was crescent-shaped and rose about 160 feet above the surface. At its western extremity stood a stone slab, indicating, I have no doubt, some winter track across the ice. A little strip of thick, luxuriant grass grew along its foot, and was now, at any rate, safe from interference, for the Tibetans possessed nothing in the shape of a boat by which to reach it; but the droppings of yaks and sheep showed that it was sometimes visited in the winter, when the lake froze, and so became connected with the shores. The limestone cliffs plunged steeply down on every side, the angle of inclination being 47° north and 43° west; this being the prevailing slope of the entire region.

The top was crowned with three cairns of stones, and afforded us a splendid and very useful view of the southern reaches of the lake. As we were not likely to visit them, I seized the opportunity to draw a sketch map of the lake in that direction.

Whilst we were tramping towards "Kalpet Sound,' Nakktsong-tso had appeared to extend a long way to the south; in fact, right up to the foot of the rocky ridge which blocked the view in that direction. But it now turned out that the islet was only about a mile distant from the southern shore; the illusion being due to the refraction of the air, which caused the extremely low steppe that stretched between the lake and the foot of the mountains to disappear. We perceived that it was covered with green pasture, and was sprinkled over with black dots—yaks, horses, and sheep; and besides eight black tents, there were also two stone buildings, probably local temples.

Beyond the island in the west three wild, irregularly formed crests appeared to rise from a larger island, or perhaps they—well, that was precisely what we were to find out presently. From the southernmost of the three spurs a low promontory jutted out a considerable distance into the lake. Having doubled this, we steered 80° west of south, and kept on in the same direction until nightfall. Immediately on our right we had the most southerly of the three mountain spurs. It was like a gigantic wall built up of immense, rugged blocks of stone, and in places rose sheer from the lake, which was shallow, or seldom more than six and a half feet deep. Further west the lake contracted, and we seemed to have entered a *cul de sac*. Narrower and narrower grew the lake. We passed the west end of the first spur. We passed the west end of the second spur—it culminated in a fantastic sort of pinnacle. By this we were only about half a mile from the southern shore; but what was this we had on our right hand? Was it an island, or not? These questions we kept asking ourselves at each stroke of the oars. Still on and on we rowed into the mysterious sound, until the scraggy promontory, which reflected itself in the still, bright surface of the lake, deepened its tints to purple and red where the setting sun fell upon it. In fact, the water was so transparent that the algæ and aquatic plants at the bottom were as easy to see as the plants in an aquarium.

We were following the shore-line, which now swung off to the north-west. As the strip of grass along its margin was untouched, we again hoped it was an island, so that we might

spend another peaceful night free from the worrying attentions of the Tibetans. Opposite the western extremity of the second spur, that is on the other side of the water, towered an imposing mountain-knot, and at its southern foot, only a few hundred yards distant, we suddenly perceived a stone hut, with smoke rising from it. A solitary dog rushed out of it down to the lake-side and began to bark vociferously.

By this it was twilight. We paddled steadily along the tranquil sound, until the barking of the dog died away behind us. The cliffs, shooting up perpendicularly on both sides, flung back sharply the echoes of every stroke of the paddles. It was like rowing through an immense rock-built temple consecrated to Nature and Nature's God. Above head between the stupendous mountain walls a couple of royal eagles were sailing slowly round and round, poised on widespread, motionless wing.

All at once the sound appeared to come to an end; but no, it was only a low tongue of land stretching about seven-eighths of the way across the passage. Behind it the waterway still continued towards the north-west, though the jutting crags prevented us from seeing very far ahead. And then night dropped her veil over the scene, and lovely though it was, hid it from our eyes. It was time to stop and land. Now to turn in in an unknown country, and amongst strangers of whom we knew nothing, was not altogether pleasant, even though I had my revolver with me. As soon as we had drawn our boat safe on shore, we set to work to explore our immediate surroundings, and to our great satisfaction soon discovered that the tongue of land left a passage-way about 150—160 feet wide along the south foot of the mountains, so that we were effectually cut off from the natives, who, having no boat, would be unable to interfere with us. There was plenty of dry and excellent argol, and we soon had a comfortable fire burning, its light blue flames being as noiseless as St. Elmo's fire; for argol never crackles like wood. The night was bright and still, and we spent it quite peacefully crouched together in our sleeping-skins. Next morning, as soon as the sun tipped the summits of the cliffs on the west side of the sound, we were on foot again, and lit a fire, and put on the water to boil for tea. Thanks to Cherdon, we were well supplied with food in the shape of a whole roast goose, and two or three cakes of bread; and this was not the first time that I and Kutchuk had camped together. The little pools along the shore were sheetêd with ice; but

it soon grew warm, and at one p.m. the thermometer touched 14°.4 C., or 57°.9 Fahr.

Nor was it long before Kutchuk's blade was once more cleaving the water, and we were skimming along towards the north-west. I can scarcely imagine anything more sublime and, at the same time, enchanting, than the cliffs we were travelling between—it was like a Venetian lagoon flanked by ancient palaces of Cyclopean masonry. Time after time our view was curtailed by the jutting crags, and we repeatedly thought we had reached the point where we should have to turn back; but the defile wound on and on, and the natural canal continued to open up one perspective after another. The depth did not exceed 11½ feet, and the breadth was in general not more than a couple of hundred yards. All this time we were fortunately travelling north-west, the right direction to bring us to the rendezvous.

But upon doubling a projecting headland on the right we were greatly astonished to perceive some yaks and horses. As we shot past the headland, three men came rushing down to the shore, and shouted and threw stones at their animals to drive them inland. At the foot of the next headland on the right two black tents made their appearance, and beside them stood a man, a woman, and a boy, all of whom displayed the utmost amazement at seeing such strange visitors in their locality. Here, if anywhere, they should have lived in peace, for their dwelling was almost entirely surrounded by water. Seeing these nomads where we did, we assumed that they dwelt upon a peninsula, and that we should soon have to turn and row all the long way back again. In fact, we thought we could hear the Tibetans crowing over us as we rowed deeper and deeper into the bottle-shaped channel. One of them ran to the top of the nearest headland: was it that he might witness our discomfiture when we reached the end of the fjord?

But once again the sound widened out, and yet another deep vista unfolded itself towards the north-west. By this the skiff was leaking, and we had to bale. Whilst we were busy with this it came on to snow, though shortly afterwards the sun peeped out again. All of a sudden the depth increased to 38¼ feet, and after that the view opened out still wider, and again our hopes revived. Perhaps, after all, we should be able to struggle out into the lake without being forced to turn back. But all at once our spirits sank to zero: the sound suddenly came to an end, terminating in low flat land. We got out and dragged our boat

as far as we could through the shallow water into a wedge-shaped bay, and there stuck helplessly fast. Kutchuk, taking off his nether garments, waded through the soft deep mud and climbed the nearest hill to look round. The first thing he observed was a river coming from the south, and entering a smaller lake, which appeared to be connected with the Nakktsong-tso. Thereupon we drew the skiff on shore, took it to pieces, and in a couple of journeys carried it and our baggage across the neck of land, 500 or 600 yards wide, which separated the bay from the river, an entertainment which cost us three full hours. However, even that was better than turning back. The river was divided into two arms, and immediately opposite its mouth the lake was choked with mudbanks, on which hundreds of gulls were busy. We now rowed towards the north-east, having on our left an especially imposing cliff. It was still a sound we were in, though broader than the one we threaded before; here the cliffs formed monumental gateways.

At length our eyes were gladdened by the sight so long wished for. Behind a pier-like sandy headland, on which a score of gulls stood, glittering white in the setting sun, we perceived the widespread dark blue waters of the Nakktsong-tso. Thus we had at last succeeded. Strictly speaking, it was a peninsula we had rowed round, and its only connection with the mainland was the narrow isthmus across which we carried our boat. The isthmus evidently consisted of alluvial mud, deposited by the river, and it had gone on accumulating until at last it completely choked up the sound. Except for this the locality where we saw the nomads would have been a perfect island. Thus Nakktsong-tso, which on several of the maps does not figure at all, while on others its position is greatly in error, proved to possess a very remarkable configuration. That is to say, it formed a watery ring or circle, like the lake of Yamdok-tso south of Lassa; and while it was tolerably wide in the north, in the south it was as narrow as a fjord.

On the other side of the pier-shaped sandy headland the depth increased suddenly from 10 feet to close upon 73. We rowed 60° east of north, and later on in the afternoon encountered a head wind and a "high sea." When the sun sank to the level of the horizon behind us, the water over those reaches which were only 10 feet deep changed from dark blue to a vivid green, through which we saw lacustrine growths below as distinctly as if we had been looking through a mirror. Our

goal was a cape on the northern shore, whence we ought to be able to see the signal-fires of our camp. But the cape lay right in the teeth of the wind, and the shades of night were gathering fast about us; hence we were forced to put in to shore at the first spot we could reach. The night was again exceptionally clear, with a vivid moon, though the wind blew cold and keen; yet what cared we for that, once we were snugly tucked away like marmots in our warm furs? Fortunately, during these two nights that we camped out, it did not rain. We were tired, and the lullaby of the lake soon hushed us to sleep. I shall not readily forget those beautiful nights under the bright sparkling sky of Tibet, with its thin, pure mountain air, and the hushed music of its entrancing scenery.

That night the thermometer went down to a bare 2°.0 C. (or 35°.6 Fahr.). On the following morning we again started early with a strong east wind dead against us. It was cold and uncomfortable, and the lake ran so high that we had to keep close in to the shore. Then to cap all, five minutes after we started, we were overtaken by a terrific storm. The hail came down in such quantities that the inside of the boat was soon white all over; though immediately after it began the wind dropped and the waves subsided. The squall lasted for over two hours, and all the time seemed to hang directly over our heads. Behind us the sky was black and the mountains shrouded in white, while to the east the landscape was bathed in bright sunshine. We ourselves were enveloped in a sort of twilight, halfway between winter and summer. Gradually the hail changed into snow, which fell as soft as thistledown and clung to the canvas of the boat. For a couple of minutes the sun peeped out, then crept behind the clouds, and once more showed itself; all this time the snow continued to fall thick and fast, and the lake was greatly agitated. The water was of a most wonderful blue-green colour, a lambent and impressionable element, through which, in spite of its agitation, we were able to study with perfect distinctness every feature of the bottom of the lake.

Being compelled to rest awhile on a promontory, I walked to the top of the rising ground to have a look round, and there on the northern shore, sure enough, was the caravan straggling along, dogged by the black swarms of the Tibetans. Soon after resuming our journey, we came to an island on our right; it was of considerable size, and a score of horses were grazing on it. Here two capes nearly met, one jutting out from the island, the

other from the mainland opposite, like the carbon sticks in an electric lamp. The strait between them was so shallow that the boat scraped the bottom. Here again there were large flocks of gulls fishing amongst the broken water, which frothed and foamed like a cataract in a river. This was the fjord that gave access to the island.

An hour later and we were opposite the camp. It stretched all along the shore; men and horses being sprinkled over every hill-side, while every now and again the columns of smoke which rose from the fires were snapped across and partly blown away by the wind. We had five tents, the Tibetans nineteen; but most of the latter were encamped round a fire in the open air. All my men were down on the shore to meet me, the Cossacks receiving me as usual with a military salute. I greeted them, as I always used to do in a morning, in the three languages—"Sdrazdvicheh!" to the Cossacks; "Salaam aleikum," to the Mussulmans; and "Amur sän baneh" to our Mongol Lama.

When they found I did not return, the Tibetan emissaries grew terribly uneasy, and redoubled their sentinels round our camp. The first evening Hlajeh Tsering went to the Cossacks, and asked them what had become of me. They answered, without blinking or turning a hair, that I had rowed over to the southern side of the lake, whence I proposed to make a dash for Lassa, and they were ordered to stay where they were till I returned. Upon this the emissary was immensely put out, and hastened to send out patrols in every direction, especially to the south. But during the course of the second day they must have found out that we were still on the lake, for they forbade the nomads who dwelt along its southern shore to render us any assistance. During the day's march they several times counted my men, and always found that two of us were missing.

Although they could not quite understand how things hung together, they suspected that one of my men had taken the horses round the lake, so that I and one or two of my attendants might ride to Lassa. In consequence of this they dealt more stringently with the caravan, and refused to supply them with provisions, and doubled the outposts at night. Nor did they relax these measures until they perceived the skiff labouring shorewards through the breakers. Their strength now amounted to close upon 200 men, not counting several patrols which had not yet returned; whereas we were only 18, that is to say, one against ten, or, if I counted the Cossacks only, one against fifty.

The Tibetans must have a very despicable opinion of us Europeans. Most travellers who have advanced as far as the "holy sphere" have arrived in such a pitiable and destitute condition, that it has only been with the assistance of the Tibetans themselves that they have been able to struggle out of the country. The Tibetans had never seen a strong caravan in good condition, one strong enough, I mean, to travel without asking their permission. I was, I admit, strongly tempted to play them a trick by crossing the lake secretly and making a dash for Lassa; it would have been quite easy to smuggle two or three horses away from the pasture in broad daylight. However, as I should really have gained little, probably only two or three days' march at the most, I abstained.

The Land of the Burkhans, the southern part of the Land of the Holy Books, is taboo to Europeans; it is the patrimony of the Dalai Lama, a sacred land, his own peculiar property. It is not that the lamas are more fanatical now than they were in the days when they welcomed the Jesuit missionaries; and certainly they are not less tolerant at the present day than in 1845, when Huc and Gabet spent several months in Lassa. Their policy of isolation during the last half century or so has not been dictated by religious, but by political motives. Their tactics, peaceful, but so far successful, have aimed at guarding their frontiers against Europeans, and conducting their unbidden guests politely, but firmly, out of the country. Still, Tibet will have to meet her destiny. So long as the Tibetans are inhabitants of the same planet as we are, they will have to reconcile themselves to our desire to know all about them, to study their religion and its sacred writings, their temples, their manners and customs, to explore their country and its approaches, to map their majestic mountains and sound their capricious lakes. So far, however, they have not fallen victims to specious representations about the growth of commerce—that is to say, the importation of tobacco, spirits, opium and fire-arms. They say, in effect, "Away with all your luxuries, with your steel, your gold and silver! All we want is to be left alone in peace in our own country."

When I said, "I will take the southern road to Ladak," they answered, "There is no southern road." When I spread the map out before them and pointed to the road, they objected, "Well, there is a road; but it is only for us. You may not travel through the Land of the Burkhans." And when I pro-

tested, "You are inhospitable," they hastened to answer: "Your land is for you; we have nothing to do there. But our country is for us; you must therefore leave it, and go home to your own."

It must have been a very expensive business to maintain a force of 200 men on a war footing, to say nothing of the loss caused by the men's absence from their own homes, and the care of their herds. But the expense did not trouble them, provided they were able to keep the intruder outside their borders. All this occasioned them an immense amount of trouble, and yet, in spite of it all, they were always friendly and polite. Their jealousy of strangers is only aimed against Europeans. Chinese, Ladakis, and the adjacent Asiatic races all have free entrance into Tibet. Hlajeh Tsering's cook was a Dungan or Mohammedan Chinese, who understood a little Chanto, or Turki, and had been in East Turkestan. The Mohammedans call everybody who does not profess Islam "Kapers," that is to say, "Heathens," equally whether they are Asiatics or Europeans; but the Tibetans exclude from their country none except Europeans, consequently their isolation is political, not religious. A Chinaman, a Japanese, a Buriat, an Indian Pundit like Nain Singh or Krishna, a merchant of Leh, none of these would experience any difficulty in entering Lassa. And when an Asiatic has been properly instructed, he has been able to bring home valuable reports of what he has seen. Hence, as I have already said, we know Lassa better than any other city in Central Asia, with the possible exception of Kashgar, Kulja, and Urumtchi. One who has been the guest of the lamas in Urga, Kum-bum, Himis, and other temples in Ladak, can testify that in each of these places he was received with the greatest hospitality, and never perceived any signs of intolerance whatsoever.

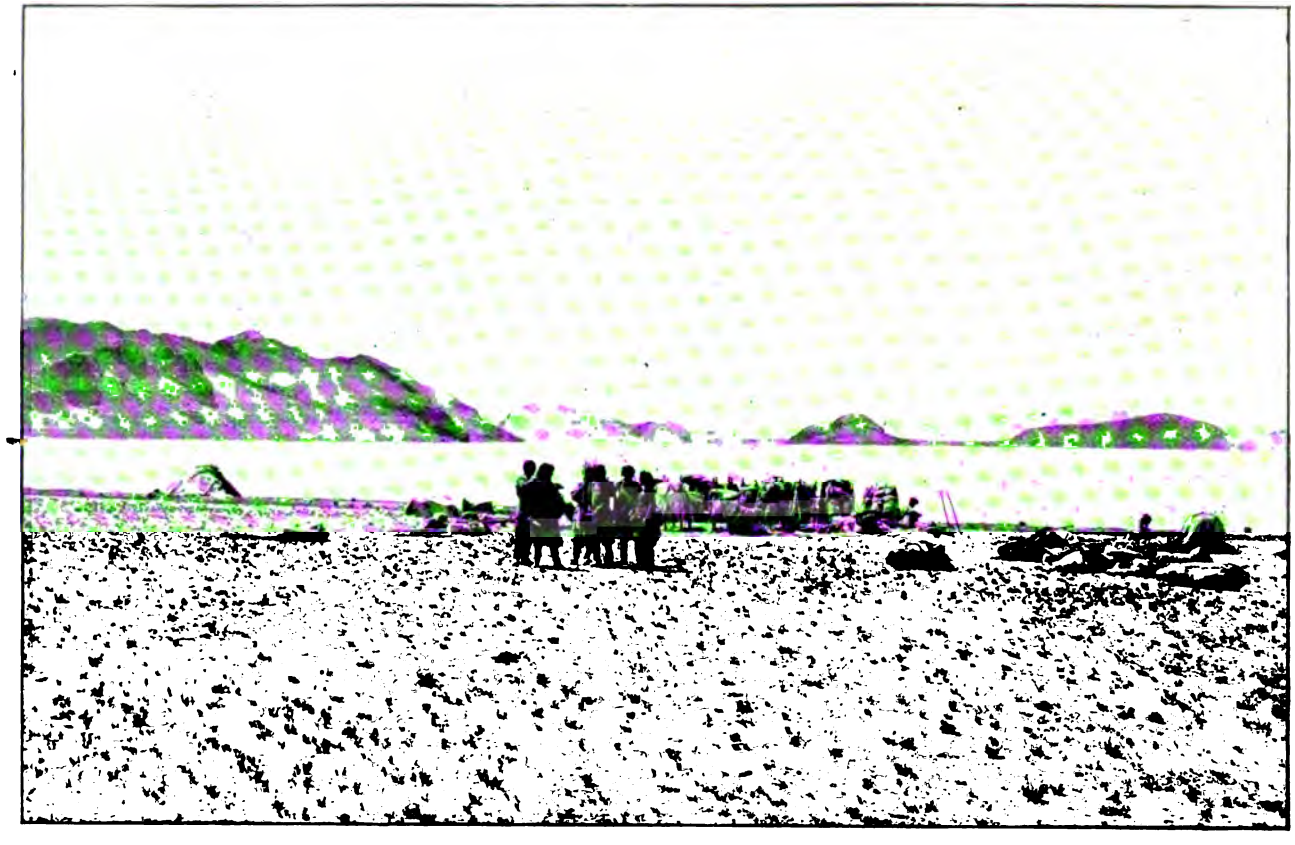
After a bright still evening it came on to hail about ten o'clock, and then turned to snow, and snowed all night, so that it was quite strange to hear the crunching of our night-watchman's footsteps as he trod his rounds. Next day, the 17th September, the snow quickly melted in the sun, though not on the northern faces of the hills. In the extreme south a stupendous pyramidal peak, which far overtopped all its neighbours, was a cone of glittering white, and being perfectly regular in formation, it bore a close resemblance to an extinct volcano.

I now ordered the caravan to proceed to the mouth of the Yaggyu-rapga. The camel on which Kalpet had died fell

ill, and would soon die in its turn, because, as Turdu Bai said —and he understood all about camels—it had carried a dead man. The weather was so fine it tempted me on to the lake again; and I was only too glad to escape a whole day's march. This time Ördek was my boatman. Putting the skiff and baggage on horses he rode north across the narrow neck of land which parted the Nakktsong-tso from the Selling-tso. This isthmus was of a remarkable character. The water-parting lay immediately north of the Nakktsong-tso and only 30 or 40 feet above its level; but to reach the Selling-tso was a ride of a considerable distance, and in the course of it we descended 150 to 160 feet, so that the latter lake lay about 120 feet lower than its neighbour. I assume, of course, that the Natkksong-tso must have an outlet, although I failed to discover it. Possibly it has an underground connection with the Selling-tso. As we went down towards the latter, we again observed the same distinctly marked beach-lines that we had noticed when we approached its shores before.

The low-lying strip of sand next the lake was so muddy, that we were forced to wade a long way out before we could get our boat launched. The depth was trifling, seldom more than ten feet. The bottom consisted of greyish-blue clay, without a trace of vegetation, and the water was of a cheerful, spring-like green, and was arched over by a bright, sunny sky. Nevertheless, the only feature of the landscape that stood out sharply and distinctly was the broad peninsula which had forced us to turn back a few days before; we now saw that it was prolonged eastwards by a series of small pointed rocks, which seemed to hover just above the water. By directing the telescope to the left we were able to follow the caravan and its Tibetan escort. The latter had almost doubled in strength during the course of the day, owing to the arrival of several small reinforcements of mounted men. Above their heads hung a heavy, black hail-cloud, which, judging from the shafts of alternate light and dark that stretched down from it to the earth, kept persistently pouring out its contents over them the whole of the time. Not a drop, however, fell where we were.

We steered at first north-north-west, until we had rounded the promontory where the Alla-sangpo entered the lake; after that we went due west, making for the bifurcation of the mountain spurs which shut in the valley of the Yaggyu-rapga on the south. The sun was setting behind the mountains, causing



View Across the Chargut-tso, Looking West.

them to stand out like a black silhouette sharply outlined. It was quite dark when we reached the big camp, the fires of which gleamed like the gas-lights in a little town.

On the 18th September I gave orders to start early. Whilst we were loading up, some of the Tibetans came forward and asked us to stop over the day; Hlajeh Tsering and Yunduk Tsering were obliged to return, and it would be in our own interest if he bought our horses and arranged for the hire of yaks before they finally left us. I answered that it was a matter of indifference to us where they went; *we* were going on without delay. "In which direction?" they asked. I pointed west, up the valley of the Yaggyu-rapga. "It is impossible for you to advance that way," they asserted, "you must go to the north-west." Our answer was to make an instant start upstream, keeping to its northern or left bank. The valley was grand, embraced as it was between the imposing mountain-spurs. From the summit of a hill, soon after starting, we obtained a delightful view of another large lake in the west, richly diversified by rocky islands, headlands and creeks; to all appearance it was almost as complicated as the Nakktsong-tso.

Ere we had advanced very far we were overtaken by the Tibetans, riding in troops of 15 to 20. Wherever we turned our eyes there were the black horsemen, with the red flags fluttering from the forks of their musket-rests.

Upon approaching nearer to the new lake, we perceived that the line of cliffs on our right stretched out some distance into the lake, and formed a peninsula with perpendicular faces. It would be impossible to get round it. The Tibetans, however, showed us a pass, and a very difficult one it was, in some places so steep and rough that had a camel slipped he would have been like a raw beefsteak by the time he got to the bottom. From the summit of the pass a new and glorious view burst upon our eyes towards the north-west, across another portion of the lake which was likewise beset with picturesque peninsulas and rocky islands. Down the slopes rolled the black troops of the Tibetans like a succession of avalanches, enveloped in clouds of dust. Spreading themselves along the regularly-formed strip of shore, they speedily ran up their tents, and the smoke was already curling from their camp-fires when we arrived.

Camp no. LXXXIV., on the eastern shore of the Chargut-tso (15,135 feet), was one of the best and most comfortable I have ever pitched my tent in. No matter which way we turned,

the view was one to charm the eye and gladden the mind. To look west, deep into the fjords of the lake, was like looking into the vistas of a forest of stone. The islands and craggy headlands grew lighter and lighter in tint as they receded in the far distance, and the whole scene was bathed in sunshine. The Tibetans, with their picturesque attire and warlike equipments, were just the figures that this rugged landscape demanded.

The strip of beach was like the high street of a busy town —full of life and colour. Without counting ours, there were 25 tents, and yet the greater part of the native soldiery were gathered around fires in the open air. The shore was alive with men and horses. I only remember one occasion on which I dwelt in a larger camp, and that was in 1890, when I travelled in the train of Shah Nasr ed-Din to Mount Elburz. The numbers of our escort had gone on increasing until they approached 500 men. At dusk Almaz came in alone. Kalpet's camel was dead—Turdu Bai was right.

We could not quite make out what the Tibetans were after. Our faces were now definitely set towards Ladak ; why then had they called together such a large force ? Did they mean to make an attack upon us by night ? At any rate we appointed strong guards for that night, and held our weapons in readiness. About an hour after midnight I was awakened by an unpleasant dream. I was lying on my right arm, which was stretched out along the ground, and the hand grew numb and without feeling, and was icy cold. By chance I happened to touch it with my left hand, and being only partly awake, I fancied the Tibetans had flung a dead body into my tent. In a moment I jumped up and struck a light, and found the tent empty ; then, as soon as my thoughts cleared, I saw how the matter stood.

Here beside this beautiful lake we stayed two days, and the time passed all too quickly, what with visiting the Tibetans and entertaining them, and discussing the pros and cons of the route to Ladak. I said frankly that I proposed to go my own way, and should refuse to receive instructions from anybody. But the Tibetans declared we should have an escort all the way, and they undertook to procure us everything we wanted until we reached Ladak. Hlajeh Tsering, having heard that Kamba Bombo had given me two horses, made me a similar present ; besides which, he said that, as our caravan had been so fearfully decimated, 40 yaks were always, by special command of the

The Tibetan Emissaries' Guard at the Chargut-tso.

Dalai Lama, to be at our disposal. Strange that the Tibetans should be so friendly and courteous, for this was the second time I had attempted to approach the forbidden land. Under similar circumstances almost any other Asiatic race would have promptly made an example of us; but the Tibetans are far too good-natured and inoffensive to resort to violence; they never advanced beyond threats and the empty alarums of war.

At noon on the 19th September the Tibetans provided a magnificent spectacle for our entertainment. I had told Hlajeh Tsering that I wished to photograph him and his colleague, and after that the whole of his force of cavalry. They complied with my request with the greatest of pleasure, and at once called out 200 or 300 of their men. They drew them up in rank and file, but it was anything but an easy thing to get them to stand still. When I asked them to raise their swords and lances into the air they obeyed instantly; but the action awakened their warlike instincts, the horses grew restive, and the whole troop burst away as if charging home in an attack, uttering the fiercest war-cries as they galloped. It was in truth a wild sight to see them racing across the steppe, their accoutrements jingling, their weapons flashing in the sun. My photographic ambitions had perforce to rest until their warlike ardour subsided, and they were made to understand that when it came to photographing, there was no need for them to make such a display of energy or shout so desperately loud.

CHAPTER XXX.

STORM-STAYED IN THE CHARGUT-TSO.

THE 20th of September was the day fixed for starting on the long journey to Ladak; but the Tibetan emissaries begged us to wait until next morning, when they would accompany us some days on the road. The 20th was one of their great religious holidays, and they wished to stay quietly in their tents. To this request I acceded, and all the more readily because the enchanting waters of the Chargut-tso had for me an attraction I could not resist, and yet the treachery of the siren lurked behind its smiling face.

This time I selected Khodai Kullu to be my boatman, and we directed our course towards the outermost extremity of the craggy peninsula which bordered our bay on the south. Thence we pushed out towards the open part of the lake, but were driven back by a storm from the west. As soon as we saw the sky begin to darken we at once turned back, and, at the risk of tearing our boat to pieces against the sharp-edged stones, effected a landing on the steep, rocky shore of the peninsula. I was not going to be detained a prisoner there, so, bidding Khodai Kullu launch again, we set off to paddle back to camp diagonally across the bay, which by this was in a state of considerable commotion. The lake, indeed, ran so high that one moment we were down in the "trough of the sea," and the next were balancing on the crest of a lofty wave. The boat pitched and shivered and creaked alarmingly, and we travelled at a terrific pace, our progress being watched with the closest interest by a crowd of Tibetans gathered along the shore. We could see them when we rose to the tops of the breakers; they were watching us in silence, and with their hearts in their mouths. And, to tell the truth, we were not without anxiety ourselves. One moment we lunged forwards, and I thought we were going to be dashed to pieces against the shore; but the next moment we were being sucked back by the receding wave. The next time we were

borne shorewards, Khodai Kullu, who held himself in readiness, leapt nimbly out, and at the same moment all four Cossacks plunged into the water, and literally carried me ashore between them. It was a smart piece of work. The Tibetans came hurrying up to convince themselves that I was alive and unharmed.

As soon as the storm subsided, we put out again, and succeeded in taking a series of soundings. Indeed, we stayed out until after dark, and had to finish our measurements by torchlight. As we drew in to shore, our bay presented quite an animated spectacle. Fires were blazing all round its shores, giving it the appearance of an illuminated harbour, and the smoke

Tibetan Soldiers Gambling beside the Chargut-tso.

from them was being wafted across the lake, where it hung like a greyish-blue veil above the now placid waters. Then the moon came out and flung a broad ribbon of quivering silver across the lake, and so added the magic touches of her glamour to the already entrancing landscape. As we pulled ashore we heard the gossip of the men and the Tibetan soldiers. They were drinking tea, smoking, and playing dice.

When I was called on the 21st of September, the thermometer stood just at freezing-point. The lake was as smooth as a mirror, and with its long chain of projecting rocky headlands looked like an immense fjord or river. It was such a bright, beautiful autumn morning, I just longed to be out on the water, especially

as it would take me away from the noise and confusion of the 500 Tibetan soldiers.

Taking with me Kutchuk and provisions for three days, as well as warm felts and such instruments as I should require, I once more embarked on the Chargut-tso. The caravan started about an hour later, the Tibetans accompanying them in small detached parties, which kept riding all round them. But we soon lost sight of the long black strings of moving animals behind the intervening mountains. My men had instructions to encamp somewhere near the western end of the lake, and there wait until we joined them. The Tibetan emissaries were uneasy at this new lake-trip, and wondered what it meant. They did not like it at all.

We had barely been started a quarter of an hour when a fresh breeze sprang up in the west, and the face of the lake clouded over. Then it grew crumpled; then it began to rise; and finally it broke into waves. In short, we were in for another gale, and had to suspend our soundings and look after our own safety. It was too late to turn back; and even if we could have done so, there was nobody left at the old encampment to help us ashore. Nor was there a headland along the south shore behind which we could seek protection. All we could do was to row hard in the teeth of the storm, until we could obtain shelter behind the nearest craggy islet. However, I managed to obtain a couple more soundings. The maximum depth amounted to 138 feet. Every breaker we encountered drenched us to the skin. The water ran off my cap, and I had hard work to see through my spectacles. Note-books, felts, all our paraphernalia were as if they had been dipped in the lake. We toiled like galley-slaves, struggling against both wind and lake. At length, however, we got under an islet, where the waves were not so high. Close underneath it the depth was no less than 111½ feet. We were rather exhausted when we stepped on shore, but we made haste to pull our little boat well up out of the reach of the waves. Were she to be washed away, we should be in a most precarious position.

The little islet we landed upon was shaped like a saddle; that is to say, it consisted of two rounded knobs, with a depression or isthmus between them, not more than 350 yards across. I walked to the western side of the islet, and—I blessed my stars I was not just then at the mercy of the tempest. Having ascertained what sort of a place it was we were imprisoned on, we

set about making ourselves comfortable. The boat set up on end afforded a certain amount of shelter against the wind, and a felt did duty as an awning, for all this while the sun was pouring down its golden rays out of a turquoise blue sky. By a fortunate impulse I had brought a book with me. Kutchuk dropped off asleep, and soon began to snore. Meanwhile the wind howled and whined in the crevices of the rocks. Having nothing better to do, about three in the afternoon we set to work and gathered sufficient yappkak and argol—there was plenty of both—and made a fire and had tea. At intervals Kutchuk got up and went to the western end of the islet, to see what the lake looked like ;

Our Camp on the First Island in Chargut-tso.

but he always came back with the intelligence that the boat could not possibly live amid such a seething tumult. With the help of the telescope we were able to make out large flocks and herds, and several tents, along the northern shore of the lake.

Evening was approaching, and yet the wind showed no sign of abating, and the breakers continued to thunder against the west end of the islet. I had chosen this method of travel with the view of escaping the noisy confusion of the march, and enjoying the quiet beauties of Nature in solitude. Now, however, I was only anxious to get back to my people. Even the worst uproar of the camp would be better than being held a fast prisoner on a tiny island in the middle of a Tibetan lake. The sun set, bright,

smiling with malicious glee. Deep shadows dropped down upon our little encampment, though the eastern shore of the lake was still bathed in brightness. Soon the shades of night began to creep up the mountain-sides. For a while their summits glowed scarlet; then the glow faded, and night, blue and cold, held Nature in her silent ban. What would we not have given for a glimpse of the ring of camp-fires which had lined the bay the night before! But our sole illuminant was the moon, half way towards the full.

Perhaps the wind would drop during the night. We went to sleep early, Kutchuk having orders to waken me about a couple of hours after midnight. It was often quite calm in the early morning, and if it were so next morning, we meant to seize the opportunity and row across to the southern shore. Kutchuk called me at 4 a.m. The stars were twinkling brightly, but the gale was blowing as hard as ever. We soon had a fire going, for there were nine degrees (Fahr.) of frost, and the hot tea went down famously. Then we sat on the shore, silent, musing, waiting for day to break. At length the open spaces of the sky behind the mountains began to lighten; and suddenly, as in a transformation scene, there was the sun streaming above the mountain-tops like a ball of burning fire.

But the storm, instead of subsiding, still continued to increase in violence. It was a regular "trade-wind," and blew strong and steady without relaxing a moment, while at intervals light frigates of clouds went sailing swiftly across the lake. When my book was finished I amused myself by making a map of the lake as far as I could survey it to the east and west. Whilst we lay and droned the day away on the eastern end of the islet, the western end was full of the roar of a mighty waterfall, the waves beat up so portentously high. Then I mapped the island, whilst Kutchuk gathered fuel. Then we had dinner. Then we anchored my shelter with big stones to prevent it from being blown away. Then I went to the south-west edge of the island, where the cliffs descended vertically into the lake, and sat and listened to the thunder of the waves. I closed my eyes, the better to enjoy my day dreams. Every beat of the enraged water against the iron-bound coast seemed to cry in mockery, "What do *you* want in this holy land?" Then I climbed to the top of the northern knoll to bid adieu to the sun when he set. Finally we built up a big fire, and practised the art of *dolce far niente*.

About 6.30 p.m. the violence of the wind seemed to abate,

and our hopes again rose. At 7 p.m., there was no doubt about it, the gale was nothing like so violent, although the clouds, which had massed thicker together, streamed away at the same giddy pace as before, the moon sailing on over them like a swift-keeled silver schooner. We began to study the weather with quickened interest. We went repeatedly to the western side of the island, but the lake still presented an unbroken expanse of plunging waves. Due west of us was another little rocky islet, the bearings of which I had already taken. We hoped we might at least manage to reach it before the moon set. Gradually the wind dropped, and we made haste to pack up.

Doubling the south-east corner of the island, we had on our

The South Shore of the Western End of the Second Islet.

right the steep face of the cliff, hanging like a spectre—it was faintly lighted by the moon—over the waters of the lake. At the same time we became exposed to the after-swell of the gale, though, fortunately, it was not at all dangerous. But it was so dark that we were unable to obtain a glimpse of our port, the next little craggy islet; it was merged in the mountainous background behind it. I knew, however, that it lay 87° west of south, and in that direction I steered, whilst Kutchuk rowed.

But calm and still though it was, it was anything but pleasant to row across an unknown lake in the dark. The water was as black as ink, the contours of the shore indistinguishable, the sky a deep blue-black, and the clouds drifted silently and gloomily as

shadows over our heads. The only relief to the universal dimness was the band of silver moonshine dancing softly on the heaving water. The boat was heavily laden and deep down in the water, for we had packed into her as much fire-wood as she would hold. I was, however, very comfortable in the fore half. The sounding-line lay ready to hand, and my watch, compass, velocity instrument, and itinerary note-book were all placed so as to be within the radius of the lantern. Thus I was enabled to take my observations at leisure. The maximum depth was 123 feet; we got it quite close to the first islet, but the contour of the lake bottom gradually rose as we approached the second islet. We had already passed the biggest of the promontories on both the north and south sides of the lake; we could not now be very far from our goal. But the minutes passed, and yet we did not fetch it. Could we have gone past it in the darkness? Scarcely, for I had taken accurate note of its bearings. No; there it was, scarce a minute's distance in front of us. I thought we had been steering towards a peak at the western end of the lake. It is so confusing to row in the dark, even though one has the moon to help one.

We went to rest with the intention of continuing again at daybreak; but long before that Kutchuk came and told me it was blowing again as hard as ever. For want of anything else to do I explored the little island. In outline it formed a right-angled triangle, with its hypotenuse facing north-west, though it was not more than 1,100 feet long. The southern part of the island consisted of a thin stratum of red conglomerate, and its shores were littered with rocks of the same material. The highest point did not exceed 50 feet, and it was crowned by a couple of piles of stones. The temperature at noon was over 15°.0 C., or about 59°.0 Fahr., and in the sheltered spots the gnats were dancing.

At 12.30 p.m. it was perfectly quiet, but heavy black clouds, with long trailing fringes, charged with rain, were looming up in the west. Evidently a fresh storm was brewing. But by far the hardest part of the lake still lay before us. Which was it wiser to do; to go or to stay? Our provisions were nearly done. I have never made a lake excursion under more unfavourable circumstances. It seemed as if all the bad weather throughout the whole of Tibet were being forced to take the path across the Chargut-tso, or as if the gorge in which the lake lay were a sewer for carrying off all the dirty weather in that part of the world.

By two o'clock in the afternoon we had everything packed and on board; but then the storm burst again, and it was a lucky thing for us we had not left the island. It rained for a while, then another storm swept over the country to the south of the lake, leaving all the mountains white in its track. But at the end of about an hour the weather suddenly cleared, and the lake rapidly subsided, except for a gentle swell near the shores. At the same time the sun began to droop, and the Chargut-tso looked lovely. Surely it could not be dangerous to make a dash across it; we might surely hope to get behind one of the sheltering headlands on the south before a fresh storm burst. Kutchuk rowed his hardest, whilst I continued my soundings and steered. The maximum depth I obtained at this time was 157½ feet.

Yet no sooner did we leave the sheltering headland behind us, than once again the sky darkened in the west, and the thunder began to rumble amongst the mountains to the south, where it was either snowing or raining smartly. At the same time yet another storm was venting its rage on the more distant mountains that bounded the lake on the north. On the lake itself, however, it was still fine, and the sun set amid a wreath of fleecy clouds. Then there rose above the perpendicular cliffs of the south shore, towards which we were steering, a threatening steel-blue bank of cloud. Meanwhile the atmosphere grew ominously quiet. The clouds appeared to stand still and pour out their contents in one and the same place. But we were not to get off so easily. Underneath the clouds appeared the unmistakable harbingers of another approaching storm. That is to say, their lower edges turned a fiery yellow, as though some gigantic conflagration were raging behind them. I scanned the shores anxiously. There was not a sheltering cove within sight. It would have been wisest to turn and run before the storm, until we again fetched the islet we last left. Our little craft would outride any storm, provided only she rode with it. But our supplies were nearly exhausted, and what would happen if we were to be shut up on that island without food, possibly for two or three days? No, we must luff, and manage as best we could with what protection we could find under the cliffs on the southern shore.

After a few preliminary puffs, down swooped the tempest like a hawk upon a defenceless dove. In with the sounding-line—away with the compass—out with the oars! It will be

a fight for our lives! Our boat creaks—she quivers! Bang! bang! she smites the on-driving waves as they rush upon her like berserks to the fray. Her hull is but canvas—will it hold? It bulges—it will burst—it must burst! Still, in a lake of that size, there was a limit to the height to which the waves would rise, and so far our little craft had safely ridden over the biggest of them. Never did I exert myself so desperately as I did then. By dint of a long, steady, regular pull, we gained one inch, or maybe two, at each stroke; for several days afterwards my hands were badly blistered. But the tempest was growing more furious—it was being forced through the mountain funnel in which our lake lay. "Pull away, Kutchuk! The shore is coming nearer, there is no danger! But—man alive—look out, here comes a big one!" A huge curler broke right along the stroke side. Our boat was half full of water. Backwards and forwards it washed with every pitch, with every roll. "Mind, Kutchuk! Here comes another!" If it goes on at this rate though we shall be drenched to the skin. We clench our oars till our knuckles whiten under the strain. We literally lift the boat upon our oar-blades. It can't go on much longer like this. We are sitting in water, the boat is actually half full, and the seas keep breaking over her bow. We shall go down—and soon. "Get your life-belt ready, Kutchuk! I've got mine ready!" "No, Tura, we *can* keep up till we reach that headland. Ya Allah!" Kutchuk was right—we did reach it—thank God! It was a perfect miracle we escaped disaster. I have never been so near it in any other of my boat-excursions in Central Asia, and that is saying not a little.

As soon as we came under the shelter of the headland the waves were less high, and we were able to take it more quietly. We just reached shore as it grew dark. It is, of course, no great feat to navigate a stormy lake in the dark if you have a good sound boat under you; but it is an altogether different thing when you have only a canvas skiff to trust your life to, and the gale is rending the clouds to tatters, and the wizardry of the moonshine is tipping each hissing and spitting wave with an unearthly light, and the dark, smooth hollows between suggest unfathomable depths—dark, cold and hungry!

No sooner did we land than the wind dropped. Then it began to rain, and it went on raining all night. We reared up the boat so as to make a sort of carriage-hood over our heads, and lighted a fire and dried our clothes. Then we

A Storm on the Chargut-tso.

and in two places he had counted as many as eight tents standing together, guarding the roads to Lassa. On our way back to camp we were met by several bands of Tibetan horsemen, who, after greeting me politely by putting out their tongues, turned and escorted us in triumph to our own tents. The camp lay in a latitudinal valley, one which Littledale also probably traversed. The old man, Mohammed Tokta, was worse. One of the Tibetans had died; we saw the corpse flung out for the vultures and ravens to feed upon. Although there was little more than the skeleton left, it was a loathsome sight. One of our camels also was dead. Hlajeh Tsering invited me into his tent, where he received me as though I had been a victorious general, and entertained me to a "magnificent banquet," presided over by the images of his god, wreathed in a cloud of incense.

Except for two or three short river-trips, this was the last time I used the little skiff in Tibet. I still preserve a very lively recollection of the days I spent on the Selling-tso, Nakktsong-tso, Chargut-tso, and Addan-tso; they made such a delightful interlude in the long monotony of the caravan marches. Although my investigations can only be regarded as preliminary, still they were sufficient to afford a useful general idea of the hydrography of that beautiful lacustrine region. If the surface of these lakes were to be raised some 150 to 180 feet, their basins would be converted into genuine fjords, like those of the western coasts of Norway and Scotland. Probably the region was once glaciated, though at the present day apparently no traces survive of either glacial striations or scratches, of moraines or erratic blocks. The surface rocks are disintegrated, and all evidences of glaciation, supposing they once existed, have been swept away and destroyed. The Addan-tso was the highest, as well as the largest lake of the region. It received several streams from the adjacent mountains, especially from the immense snowy ranges on the south; and it discharged its superfluous drainage into the Chargut-tso. This lake again sent its overflow through the river of Yaggyu-rapga into the Selling-tso. There it stays and evaporates; thus Selling-tso is the only one of the lakes that is salt. What connection there was, if any, between the Nakktsong-tso and the Selling-tso I was not able clearly to ascertain. The former may possibly communicate by a subterranean emissary; possibly it may empty itself into another lake situated farther to the south, which we did not see.

On the 25th of September our friends, Hlajeh Tsering and Yunduk Tsering, who had been with us since the 12th, were to take their leave. Each of them sent me his *haddik*, or "scarf of honour," and wished me a "successful journey." Then they came to say good-bye in person, and assured me that all the stores I wanted, as well as guides and pack-animals, would be provided for me by order of the Dalai Lama. When our caravan was loaded up and all ready for the start, I paid a hurried farewell visit to the Tibetan chiefs, and gave them various presents, such as revolvers, knives, compasses, and pieces of cloth. I expressed my regret at not being allowed to go through

Tents of the Tibetan Emissaries.

to Lassa, and sent my compliments to the Dalai Lama; but I promised them I should carve out my route for myself, and should not necessarily follow that which my guides wanted me to take. I told them bluntly that I would not permit the two officers who were to command our escort to assume a tone of authority towards us; they must just content themselves with inquiring every morning which route I desired to adopt. If they made themselves disagreeable I threatened I would stuff them into two of our trunks, and take them all the way home with me.

Hlajeh Tsering answered that he and his brother officer intended to remain, with a few hundred mounted men, twenty

days in the spot where we was then encamped. I saw at once that that was simply bluff, meant to deter us from turning back, and therefore replied that I intended stopping at the next fresh-water lake, and waiting until it froze. To this he replied in his turn that they could quite well stay a year where they were. Thereupon I proposed that, as we both seemed to have so much time to spare, we might as well keep one another company; and so, with a good laugh on both sides, we dropped the game of brag. Hlajeh Tsering was eating meat-balls in his own tent. Yunduk Tsering sat in his tent, with his secretaries and a whole pile of papers in front of him. He was not only drafting a detailed report to the Devashung in Lassa, but was also sending on instructions to the local chiefs all the way to Ladak.

CHAPTER XXXI.

YAMDU TSERING. A SIDE EXCURSION.

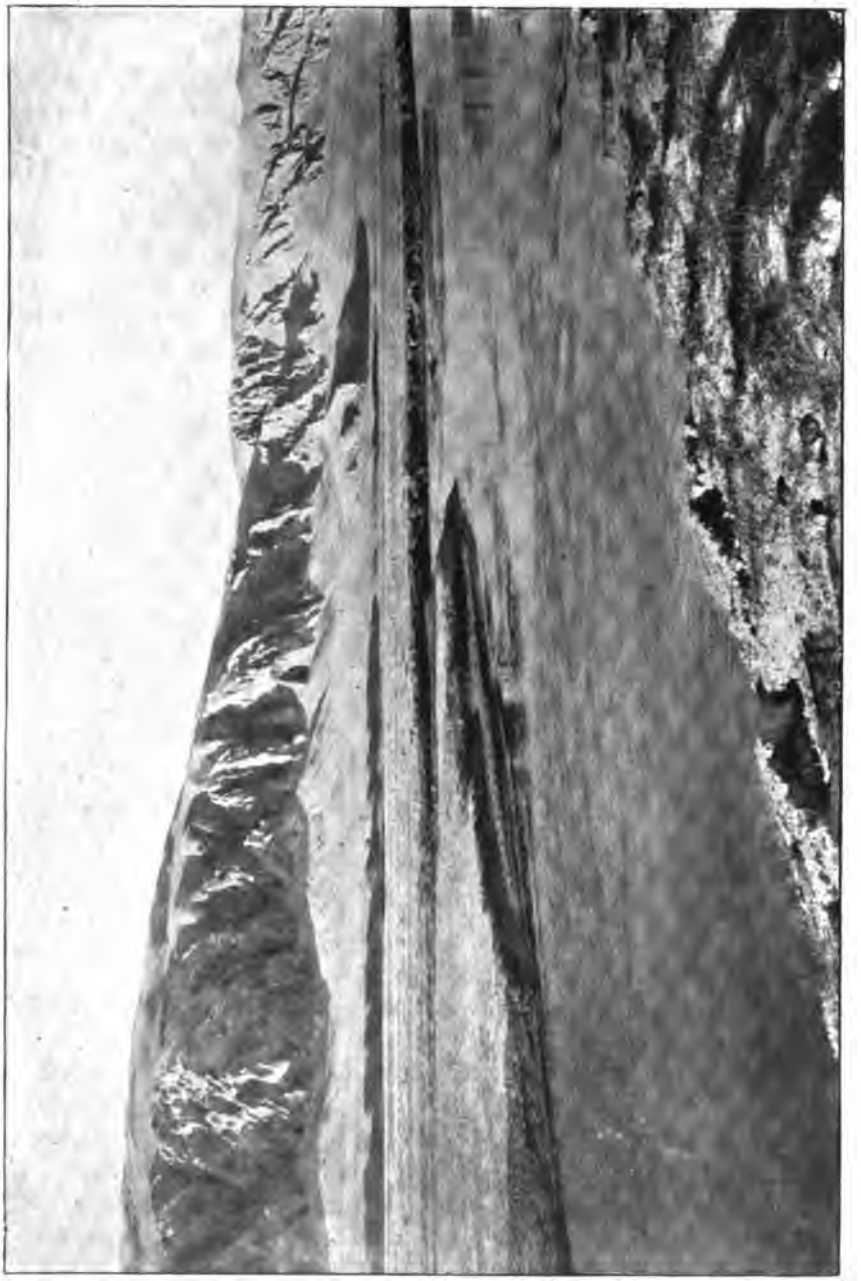
OUR road ran west through a latitudinal valley nearly 20 miles broad, with imposing mountain-ranges lying parallel to it on both the north and the south. The weather was raw, cold, and windy, and the pasture very indifferent. Nevertheless, we counted 32 black tents, or, say, 150 inhabitants, in the course of 16¾ miles. The valleys in the south of Tibet were unquestionably more densely inhabited than the northern districts; in fact, in the latter direction the inhabited country did not extend very far. Our escort was by this reduced to 22 men, under command of a chief named Yamdu Tsering, with whom I quickly became on a friendly footing. The place where we encamped the first night was called Shalung; it lay east of a lake bearing the name of Jaggtseh-tso, and receiving at its western extremity a river called Boggtsang-sangpo. As this last occurs on the map of both Nain Singh and Littledale, it may be assumed that the other names also are right. Nevertheless, I was able to identify only a very few of the names which Littledale gives.

On the 26th of September we travelled as far as the mouth of the Boggtsang-sangpo. The river was divided into several arms, and the pasture on its banks was so plentiful that we felt a day would not be lost if we stopped amongst it. Out of our original 39 camels we had only 22 left, and all of these were suffering from fatigue; while everyone of the horses that survived was in a pretty bad way. During the day's march of 17¾ miles we observed a very large number of flocks of sheep, but only 16 tents. The country also abounded in game—*e.g.*, kulans, antelopes, partridges, hares, and wild geese, so that our hunters kept us well supplied with meat. The new lake, Jaggtseh-tso, was a good deal smaller than those we had recently travelled beside, and its water intensely salt. The circular markings all round its shores indicated that it too was drying up. In one

place the former beach-lines numbered no less than seven, and all were distinctly marked, one behind the other.

During the next few days we kept close to the Boggtsang-sangpo, and crossed it in one locality by the same ford by which Littledale did. Captain Bower's route, which we had touched at the Nakktsong-tso and the Chargut-tso, now ran a good deal farther to the north, and we never came in contact with it again. Nain Singh's route lay quite as far to the south. So that by following the course of the river I have just mentioned, I was able to avoid the routes of the three travellers. who previously to myself had visited this part of Tibet. Our knowledge of the country would, of course, be increased if I struck out an entirely fresh route; though it was often impossible for me to tell whether I was keeping clear of Littledale's route or not. The map which that distinguished and capable traveller made was unfortunately drawn on too small a scale to enable me to recognise the topography of the regions he traversed. For this reason, and because my map was being constructed on such an incomparably larger scale, I regarded even those tracts in which I could not avoid travelling over the same ground as my predecessor as, for cartographical purposes, unexplored country. Littledale's map shows neither the Nakktsong-tso nor the Chargut-tso; and though Bower's map does show them both, it does not show the Selling-tso. Bower travelled between the Nakktsong-tso and the Chargut-tso, but he failed to elucidate the relation between the two. Of the Addan-tso he knew nothing whatever, nor does he show any outlet from the Chargut-tso; and he apparently considered that the Yaggyu-rapga entered the Chargut-tso, whereas it really flows out of it. I am not here criticising the cartographical material for this part of Asia; I am merely seeking to explain why it was essential for me to take several regions which are crossed by the well-known red route-lines as being still for my purpose a *terra incognita*. One of the chief objects in exploring an unknown country is, of course, to obtain materials for a map of it, and if a map is not reliable, it is virtually of little use. Both Bower's journey and Littledale's afford wonderful proofs of exploring skill and endurance; but with respect to mapping, Nain Singh's work is a long way the best, though even his map urgently needs revision.

Our first day beside the Boggtsang-sangpo was favoured with glorious weather—perfectly still, a serene and flawless sky—just



The River Boggtsang-sangpo, looking South-West.

accentuated lights and shades, and magnificent modelling in relief.

Our general order of march was now, under ordinary conditions, three days tramping and the fourth a rest-day. The 1st October was one of the last character, and most of the men spent it fishing. Shagdur was the most successful; he captured 18 fish, and then, by way of a change, went out and shot an antelope. Turdu Bai stood all day long holding his fishing-rod in his hand, and fished away with the serene patience of a born angler, and grinned most benignly when he came to show me his catch. Our Lama preferred to read his holy books (*nom*). The Boggstang-sangpo now carried a volume of 187 cubic feet in the second.

The night of the 1st October the thermometer went down to −11°.0 C., or 12°.2 Fahr. Winter was fast approaching; we must make haste to get to Ladak. We encamped again next night, the fourth in succession, beside the Boggtsang-sangpo. Its breadth was only 19½ feet, but its depth was very considerable. Hardly were the tents up than the fishing-rods were hard at work. During these days we lived principally upon fish, I almost exclusively.

The 3rd October was our last day beside the river; we left it on our left hand. I should like to have taken a more southerly route; but the country was too mountainous for our camels. From Camp no. XCV. we obtained a glimpse of the mountain which Littledale called the "volcano of Tongo"; though I was told its name was Erenak-chimmo. Seen from a distance it did resemble a regularly formed volcanic cone. Whilst the caravan plodded along its own appointed track, escorted by the Tibetans, I, Chernoff, and the Lama rode to the mountain I have just mentioned. We reached its foot across a couple of conglomerate acclivities, and having ridden as far up its side as the horses were able to climb, got off and walked. But we soon had enough of mountaineering, and stopped and took a good rest. The bare rock only cropped out in a few places; it consisted of granite, crystalline schist, and porphyry, though other rocks were represented amongst the loose pieces scattered about over the mountain-side. But the mountain was not a volcano, and never has been a volcano; it was merely a link between the parallel ranges. From its summit the only recognisable features were the dominating snowy peaks and the valleys which we had ourselves traversed all the way from Jaggtseh-tso. All the

The Valley of the Boggtsang-sangpo.

rest was one indistinguishable chaos of mountain peaks, ridges, *massifs*, spurs, ranges. Immediately to the north were several crests which presented the most fantastic outlines—pinnacles, denticulations, crenelated walls. It was so pleasant and peaceful up there amongst the winds and the skies, quite away from the caravan and its petty intrigues, that I just longed to remain two or three days.

In the eastern gable-end of the third of the short crenelated crests which I have just mentioned, we discovered a round grotto, divided into an inner and an outer apartment by means of a low wall of stone slabs. The entrance was about 9¾ feet high. The thick canopy of soot which adhered to the roof seemed to indicate that the cave had been inhabited for a vast period of time, and the floor also was covered with sheep-dung. There we stayed a short time, enjoying the picture that was presented when we gazed through the opening of the grotto. The valley below was flooded with sunshine, while we were in the shade, and cool, and sheltered from the wind. The inevitable Tibetan formula was hewn upon some of the slabs. Perhaps the cave had been occupied by a hermit, who had dedicated his life to the service of the deities of the mountain. On the northern flank of Erenak-chimmo we likewise came across an exceptionally fine obo, the largest we had hitherto seen in Tibet.

On our way back to camp, whilst riding towards a very easy pass, we stumbled across Hamra Kul in a ravine. He lay motionless on his side as though he were dead. I went and looked at him; he complained greatly, and declared he could not walk. However, I knew exactly where the shoe pinched; for on the previous day he had been deposed from his position as leader of the horse-caravan, because he had been found negligent, and Mollah Shah had been appointed to succeed him. The Tibetans had pitched their tents on the other side of the pass (16,451 feet), and they now came and complained to me that my men had paid no heed to them, when they warned them there was no pasture for a long distance to come. This, of course, I could in no wise help. I found my men encamped at a spot called Churing, where Mollah Shah, who had been a member of Littledale's caravan, knew where he was; and as if in proof of the fact that it was the same locality, we picked up an ass's shoe, a thing which could not possibly have been dropped by any other caravan except Littledale's.

The 5th of October, when we advanced 15 miles towards the west, was one of the worst days I can remember. There had been over 24½ degrees (Fahr.) of frost during the night. The brook beside the camp was frozen, and I was awakened once or twice by the sheets of ice crashing together. It was killing work riding against the wind, which in the bitter cold cut like a knife. We were chilled to the bone, paralysed with cold, prostrated. The sun shone most of the day, it is true, but its effect was neutralised by the wind. Everybody, both in my caravan and amongst the Tibetans, walked, otherwise they would have been frozen. For my own part, I confess it was fatiguing in the extreme to have to walk at that altitude and against such a powerful obstacle. When all feeling had departed out of my hands, I used to stop for a while in some ravine, and turn my back to the wind and have a quiet smoke. It will surely be a horrid winter, I thought, seeing that the autumn was beginning with such intense cold. The worst of it was, that nearly every one of our horses and camels was beginning to lose flesh. One of the young Charkhlik camels, which gave up that day soon after we started, was nothing more than skin and bone. After leading him myself a little way, I left him in charge of one of the men, and rode on; but I had not gone very far, when I came upon two other camels, which were unable to keep up. And still further on I passed Kutchuk doing his best to urge along two exhausted horses. All the latter, as well as every one of the mules, were galled.

Our sick-list was at this time greater than ever it had been before. Hamra Kul, who was left on the road the day before, was brought in by two good-hearted Tibetans. Tokta Mohammed was neither better nor worse: he sat tied on his horse silent and patient, leaning forward upon a cushion. Almaz suffered from sore eyes, and complained that he was almost blind; but he quickly recovered when I gave him a little cocaine and a pair of darkened spectacles. With wind like that we needed to have exceptional eyes if we were not to suffer from them. I do not believe it would be so very horrible to freeze to death; you would just sink into a state of lethargy and pass away without any very special degree of pain. That evening Khodai Kullu was likewise reported unwell; he suffered from shivering fits and headache, for which I gave him a dose of quinine. At this rate we should soon have half the caravan on the sick-list. Summoning Yamdu Tsering, therefore, I told him, that the

A Mountain Group North of Camp no. XCII.

time was come for him to provide us with the yaks which the Dalai Lama had promised; and he at once undertook to supply them without loss of time.

The native sheep-folds, of which we saw several during that day's march up a tributary of the Boggtsang-sangpo, consisted of a semicircular wall of stones, with their higher parts facing the prevailing westerly winds. The interior was generally hidden under a thick layer of sheep-dung, against which the grey walls showed up in decided contrast. Upon being brought to a standstill in the district of Setcha (16,563 feet) by a pretty large river, Ahmed, Islam, Hamra Kul, Mollah, and Chernoff were all behindhand, with three camels and two horses, and it was long after dark when they came in. The first camel had been killed, the second left until next morning, and only the third succeeded in crawling into camp. One horse had died; the Kashgar horse was found dead next morning, 6th October; a third collapsed during the next day's march. The caravan was dwindling with alarming rapidity. During the night the thermometer dropped to $-14°.9$ C., or $5°.2$ Fahr., and the river was frozen hard enough to bear. We only did a short march; for upon reaching pasture we stopped, although it offered only very indifferent grazing. At this rate, we could hardly hope to reach Ladak before Christmas.

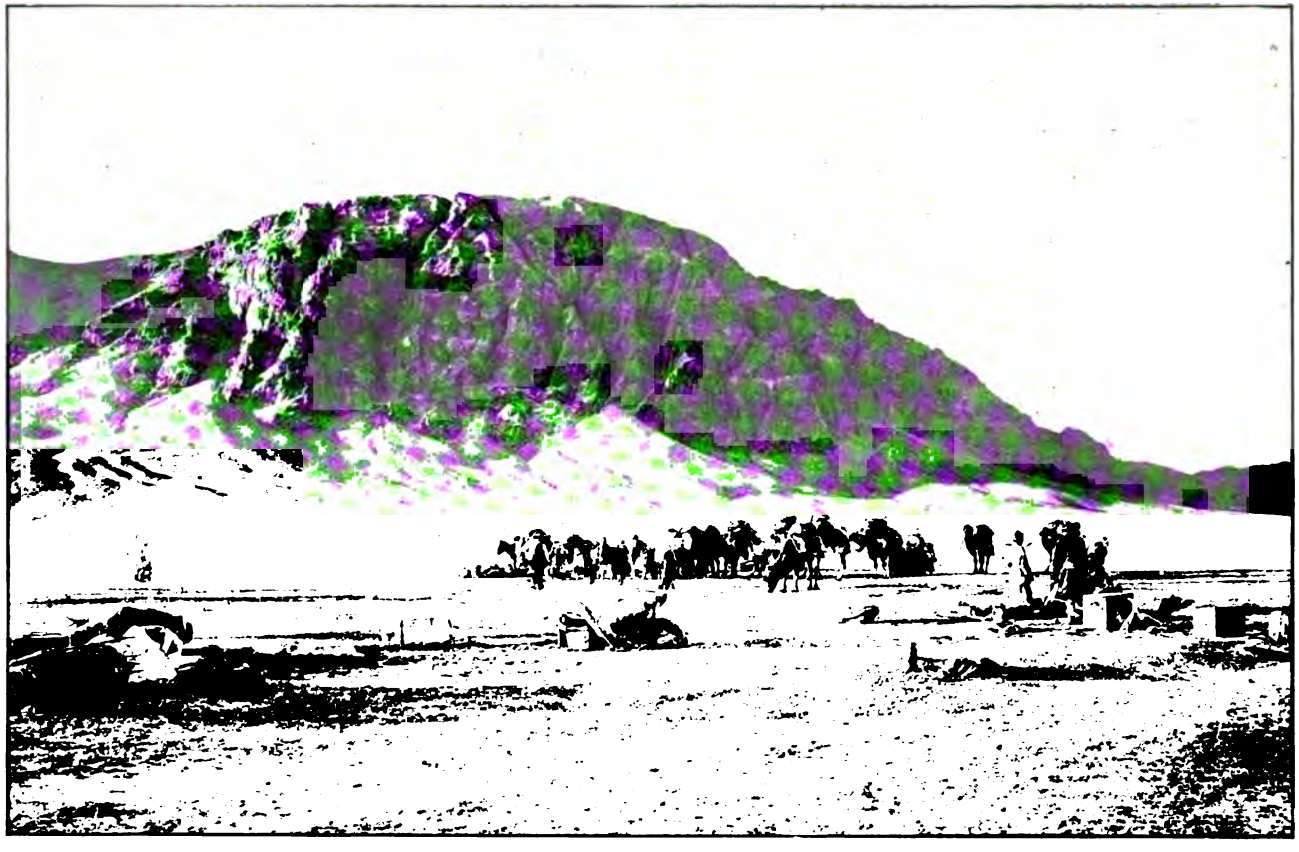
At Camp no. XCVIII., where the yaks were to join us, we set to work to rearrange all our baggage to suit them; that is, we had to tie it up in smaller loads, for a yak cannot carry as much as a camel. As early as 9 p.m. the thermometer was down to $-10°.6$ C., or $12°.9$ Fahr., and during the night it dropped as low as $-17°.9$ C., or $-0°.2$ Fahr. This was definitively the beginning of winter, and winter lasted seven months!

On the 7th October, under the pretext of seeking for better pasture, though my real object was to escape travelling over the same ground as Littledale, I took Chernoff, the Lama, Li Loyeh, and Kutchuk, with four mules, five horses, and a proportionate quantity of supplies, and struck out a more southerly route. During the night eighteen excellent yaks had put in an appearance; this released most of our animals, and especially the sick ones, which now travelled without loads. Shagdur was appointed chief of the caravan, with instructions to halt a few days at the first pasture he came to. All the invalids were mending, except Mohammed Tokta; but of his recovery there was not much hope, although he kept up his courage in a wonderful way.

Just as I was about to start, a band of Tibetans rushed forward, and seized hold of the reins and halters of our horses and pack-animals. We could not—we should not—go south; it was as much as their lives were worth. I bid the Lama tell them that if they did not instantly let go, we should use our revolvers. Thereupon they drew back; but nevertheless pursued us some distance on foot, insisting that the country to the south possessed neither pasture nor practicable path. But as we gave no answer, they finally turned back and left us.

On the other side of a low pass in the nearest range we struck the upper course of the river Churing, now frozen over. Chernoff speared five moderate sized fish with his sabre, but in his zeal fell in and got an icy bath. Turning, we saw a band of a dozen Tibetans, under command of Tsering Dashi, racing down the steep declivity of the pass. They soon overtook us, and kept close at our heels for the rest of the day. It seemed as if we were never to get away from their everlasting chatter and the unceasing jingle, jingle of their bells. The rest of the Tibetans remained behind with our caravan, under command of Yamdu Tsering. The inhabitants of two or three tents we rode past rushed out in consternation when they saw such strange people passing. Tsering Dashi pointed to a pass in the north-west, exclaiming, "the only one possible"; but we were not to be lured away, we continued our own course up the stream. We were at last forced to halt because a white horse gave up; but we turned the time to account by fishing. In the evening a fresh troop of Tibetans arrived, and the two bands conferred together in the most animated fashion. At daybreak next morning their force was still further increased, and amongst the newcomers was old Yamdu Tsering. None of them had any tents with them, but all sat and froze in the open air. The poor old man looked perfectly miserable; he had been riding most of the night, and was cold, dispirited, and heavy-hearted, because of all the trouble we occasioned him. Once more he came and begged me to return to the caravan; but when he found he could not prevail upon me, he added, that he had ordered his soldiers to tear the loads off the animals' backs; if we would not go where they wished, they were no longer under any obligation to serve us. But his statement was plainly untrue; if it had been true, Shagdur would have been certain to send me a messenger.

As we still continued to press on south up the valley, Yamdu



A Mountain Group North of Camp no. XCII. (continuation of Illustration on p. 505.)

Tsering announced that he really would go back and drive away his yaks. "As you please," I answered, "but you had better beware of my Cossacks." Mounted men again swarmed about us on every side; a fresh mobilisation had taken place. What an unconscionable amount of trouble we were giving to poor old Yamdu Tsering!

On our way up the valley we saw several other nomad tents. Whenever their inhabitants became too curious, it only needed a wave of the hand from one of the soldiers, and they instantly disappeared. Extraordinary the understanding which existed amongst these half-wild people! It was as though there existed a sort of freemasonry amongst them. They rendered the most implicit and blind obedience to their deities, and to their superiors in authority, and seemed to be absolutely insensible to bribes. At any rate, we were unable to persuade even one of them to show us the road south. Imagine a country which does not contain a single traitor!

We pitched Camp no. C. beside the lake of Jandin-tso, in which the river Churing had its origin. Its surface was slightly frozen, but the wind afterwards broke up the ice. The lake itself was fed by fresh springs, and close beside them Chernoff shot a wild-duck. On the 9th October the lake was again frozen, and the day turned out bitterly cold, with a cutting head wind. At this time there was only six Tibetans left with us. They came and politely asked me what my plans were. I answered by pointing towards a glen which opened in the west-south-west. No sooner did we strike into it than three of our escort rode off to inform Yamdu Tsering. The pass at the head of the glen was of considerable height, and afforded a magnificent view of the majestic mountains around. Due west of us towered skywards the stupendous mountain-group of Shah-ganjum, sheeted throughout with perpetual snow. It consisted of three "humps," the middle one being the highest, and in the pure transparent atmosphere had a most imposing appearance. We halted beside a marmot warren in a district called Amrik-va. The wind howled fitfully and it was bitterly cold; in fact, every bone in our bodies ached with cold.

Next morning the wind was still playing its incisive accompaniment amongst the craggy buttresses and clumps of moss. The sky was as pure as the purest turquoise, and yet the "trade wind," the most trying of the many evils of that ill-reputed land, never for one moment proved faithless to the law of its existence.

Our route led across several easy passes, through dark wild mountain scenery. Kulans, antelopes, and wolves abounded everywhere. At last, however, the glen opened out and we descended towards the north-west. That night we stopped under the shelter, as we fondly hoped, of a detached mountain group; but the gusts came plunging down from the heights above like spinning waterfalls. From some of the ranges which were snow-clad the snow was swept off in trailing streamers of white powder, which glittered intensely bright in the sunshine.

But on the 11th October the condition of our horses forbade any further advance towards the south. We had penetrated to too high altitudes; it was time to return to our caravan. Accordingly we turned their heads towards the north-west, and rode across a wide open valley that lay immediately below the eastern foot of the magnificent *massif* I have just mentioned, the Shah-ganjum, with its four rudimentary glaciers. Littledale, who passed it on the north, calls it Shakkanjorim.

Half-way across we were met by Yamdu Tsering, who through his couriers had kept constantly in touch with us ever since we left the caravan. Strange though it may sound, both he and I were glad to meet one another, and our mutual greetings were of the most cordial description. He could now see for himself, I told him, that I had no evil intention in making this excursion to the south. He protested that he felt sorry I should have the toil of travelling over so many passes, and all for nothing; he was so terribly afraid I should be tired!

After meeting him, we continued north-west through a transverse glen, and found the caravan beside a little brook of spring-water, which, although small, was deep and clear and full of fish, so that I again had fish for dinner. All, animals as well as men, were well, except our old invalid, whose body was swollen up as with dropsy. I treated him as best I knew how; but he declared he did not want to be cured—he only wanted to see me once more and then he was ready to die.

We finally parted from Yamdu Tsering and Tsering Dashi at Camp no. CIII. on the 13th October. Their orders were to accompany us to the boundary, and it was here their task ended; for we were now arrived, it seemed, at the boundary between the provinces of Nakktsong and Bomba, this last a name which occurs also on Littledale's map. They asked me to give them a certificate to the effect that they had performed their duty faithfully, and to my satisfaction. This proved that they had been

Our Lama on the Left; Yamdu Tsering and Tsering Dashi on the Right.

ordered to treat us courteously. After their departure we were to be taken over by a fresh chief, Yarvo Tsering by name.

When we started, I failed to see Yamdu Tsering and his colleague, so that I was unable to give them the revolvers and knives which I had selected as presents for them. I had already paid the yak-owners, and they were gone; but until the fresh relay turned up, we had to look after our baggage ourselves. We found them, however, in the pleasant valley of Ramlung, accompanied by the two old chiefs, who evidently did not intend to be deprived of their presents. From that valley we had an extensive prospect towards the east; at sunset the distant

Loading up the Yaks.

peaks disappeared in a ruddy illumination suggestive of a prairie fire. The sky was bright above head, but dark blue on the eastern horizon—the reflection of the higher regions where it was already night. In the foreground, the tents of the Tibetans, some black, others blue and white, stood up sharply against the hard, yellow grass, where the men were busy amongst their picketed horses. We only travelled ten miles that stage; indeed, under the prevailing circumstances it was seldom that we now did more than twelve miles a day.

On the 14th October we made a fresh start with 22 fresh yaks, hired at the rate of one *tsos* * a day for each animal, the

* We received in this part of the country eight tsos in exchange for one liang or tael (about 3*s.*) of Chinese silver, a transaction in which we were, of course, cheated.

whole under the charge of 30 attendants. The Tibetans tried as much as they possibly could to curtail the length of the day's journey; but I was one too many for them, for I always chose the new camping-ground myself. Water was becoming scarcer and scarcer, and sometimes it was impossible to find the springs without the help of the Tibetans. Shagdur, with the alertness and resourcefulness that never failed him, procured us both fresh milk and sour milk from a nomad, whose tent he discovered in a nook amongst the hills. The contour sank gradually towards the north; sometimes we were able to count as many as six parallel chains one behind the other. We were at this point travelling south of Littledale's route. At the spring of Sholung, on the evening of the 15th, we found a fresh relay of yaks waiting for us, and on the following day fresh bands of soldiers sprang up as if by magic out of the ground. The old yak-men began to haggle about the price; they insisted upon being paid in Lassa tsos, for they did not, they said, understand anything about Chinese silver. But when I answered them that it must be Chinese silver or nothing, they soon proved more tractable.

Cherdon's horse died, and only a very few of the others were able to carry their riders. Four men were, in fact, riding mules; the mules were standing the journey far better than the horses. Mohammed Tokta's feet were so swollen that we had to cut off his boots and wrap his feet in felts. We had not one drop of water all day long, and the pasture was extremely scanty, and the country more thinly inhabited. Nevertheless we were kept supplied with sheep, as many as we wanted. Not far from camp that evening we perceived 200 kulans grazing in one place in the valley.

On the 18th October we did an interesting stage of twelve miles towards the south-west. The Tibetans, with all the yaks and our baggage, struck into a ravine which pierced the range that formed the southern barrier of the latitudinal valley, saying that we too must follow them; there was only a little pass to cross. That was all very well for the yaks, but it was killing work for the camels. Hence, we declined to follow them, but continued along the mountain foot, although in doing so we had to cross an endless number of gulleys and ravines. From the spur where we turned south, we perceived that we had come quite close to the salt lake of Lakkor-tso. Littledale, whose route ran a good way north of this lake, observed that the

greater number of the salt lakes of Tibet are undergoing the process of desiccation. Lakkor-tso was a conspicuous example of this; for its former beach-lines were easily discernible up to a considerable height above the surface of the lake. The successive levels formed flat shelving tracts edged by ridges, behind which there were very often lagoons. The present shores of the lake were white with salt, which, being dry and powdery, was whirled up by the wind, until it looked like clouds of steam or drifting flour. On our way to the river Sommeh-sangpo, which flowed westwards into the lake, we crossed several creeks, then dry, but inclosed between high banks, and not seldom filled with

Camp no. CIII., at an altitude of 15,946 feet.

cones and pyramids of salt, the remnants of former thick deposits, upon which the wind had long exercised its erosive power. We encamped by the river-side.

On the south we still had the same vast and rugged mountain-chain, forming apparently for several days to come an insuperable barrier to the advance of our camels. Here we were obliged to shoot the dog Hamra; he would not let us sleep o' nights. If there were no Tibetans to bark at, he used to bark at our own night-watchmen and our own caravan animals. Here, also, two horses died, and, strange to say, two she-camels gave birth prematurely. Turdu Bai attributed that to the extreme degree of cold (−15°.4 C., or 4°.3 Fahr.), and to the fact

of their having drunk cold water at an unseasonable moment. Here, again, we were met by a fresh convoy of yaks, with their drivers. As early as 9 p.m. the thermometer was down to — 10°.0 C., or 14°.0 Fahr., and the river froze so sharply that we heard the ice cracking during the night and the pieces grinding one against the other.

CHAPTER XXXII.

VIA DOLOROSA.

On the 30th of October the "trade-wind" began at 9.30 a.m. The reason I call it this is that it set in every day with appalling regularity. After midday it increased in violence, until it blew a perfect hurricane, and like a desert hurricane swept such vast volumes of sand and dust before it that at times the landscape was completely obscured. It was quite a picture—the chalky white clouds driving in over the Lakkor-tso from its western extremity and streaming off again at its eastern end, while the waters of the lake beat tumultuously against the beach underneath. So strong was the wind alongside the lake that the camels actually staggered, and mounted men reeled in the saddle. Our journey resulted, at any rate, in the discovery of two important climatic laws for that part of the world—(1) the rainy season coincided with the latter part of the summer and the early part of the autumn; and (2) the latter part of the autumn and winter were characterized by wind, the west wind predominating.

Every now and again away went a felt, a sack, or other loose object, and had to be recovered and lashed on again. My map was nearly wrested out of my hand, and torn to shreds and tatters. We lost another of our horses, one of the Lassa lot. At this time we were travelling down the Sommeh-sangpo, having an imposing mountain-range on both our right and our left. Eventually, however, the river turned northwards, and doubling the end of the range on that side, entered the Lakkor-tso, close beside a deposit of salt, with big white hills which gleamed like flour. An hour later and we were on the edge of the steep shore; this we skirted along a high terrace, until we reached another river, which came from the south-south-east, and likewise entered the lake. We spent the night on the left bank of the new stream. All the mountain slopes in the vicinity

were scarred with horizontal lines, which, in certain lights, stood out like black rulings.

During the next day's march an extraordinary incident happened. The old man Mohammed Tokta was somehow left behind, without anybody noticing it, until Hamra Kul, who was lagging a long way in the rear with two or three tired horses, came across him in a hollow. He explained quite genially that, feeling tired, he had simply rolled off his horse, which had thereupon quietly continued as if nothing were the matter. Hamra Kul, of course, brought the old man on along with him, and when he got him into camp wrapped him up comfortably

Laying out Mohammed Tokta.

in felts and sheepskins. In the evening I went as usual to see how he was getting on, and make sure that he wanted nothing that we had it in our power to supply him with. Sometimes I used to give him a small dose of sulphonal, to make him sleep. This time, however, he was to sleep both long and heavily without any artificial aid. To all the questions that I put to him he returned perfectly rational answers; and when he said that he liked milk best, I ordered one of the men to give him all we had, and he drank a large bowlful. Then I asked him how he felt, and he smiled in quite a friendly way. But before the sun rose next morning he was stiff and cold. Nobody knew exactly when he passed away. Mollah Shah, who had the last watch, had gone off to collect fuel. Death visited the old camel-

Our Camp near the Western Shore of Lakkor-tso.

leader in his sleep; his eyes were closed, and he had not moved a muscle since the evening before.

This poor old man's death was a relief to all the survivors; for since his body had swelled up and assumed such a disagreeable black colour, we had ceased to entertain the slightest hope of his recovery. He had been ill for four months, and his own life had become a burden to him; so that his decease was really a release. Mohammed Tokta was a thoroughly honest man. Although he was the cause of a good deal of trouble to his comrades, I never heard any of them say a single unkind word to him. They were all fond of the poor old man, because he himself was always so friendly and cheerful, and made no fuss about his illness. During the last few evenings of his life, in spite of my express command to the contrary, he tried to sit up and salute when I went to visit him.

The other Mussulmans at once set about making preparations for the funeral; in fact, the grave was already dug before I was awakened with the intelligence that the old man was gone. After the corpse was washed, it was dressed in the clothes the old man wore, and then wrapped in a sheepskin and carried on a pack-saddle to the grave, where it was deposited with the same ceremonies as at the burial of Kalpet. This made the fourth death amongst my attendants since I began this series of journeys through Central Asia and Tibet. This incident did not, of course, tend to make our two remaining invalids, Almaz and Ahmed, feel any the better.

This mysterious illness, which carried off all three of the men I lost in Tibet, was not occasioned by any fault in our commissariat. We always had plenty to eat, and the food was nourishing. So long as we were in Tibet we never suffered for lack of fresh meat, especially after we entered inhabited regions, for we were always kept well supplied with sheep and lard by the inhabitants of the country; and I have surely said sufficient to show that we never neglected an opportunity when there were yaks, kulans, and antelopes to be had for the shooting. Add to this that latterly we had a very pleasant variety in fresh and sour milk, butter, and fish; while of the stores of rice, flour, and talkan, which we brought with us from Charkhlik, we still had an abundance left. We started, it will be remembered, with supplies for ten months, and we had not yet been on the march more than five and a half; in fact, we had quite sufficient of such things to last till we got to Ladak, although, as a matter of fact,

they did not quite do so. But that was because, when the camels began to break down, we tried to rally them by giving them bread and rice. Indeed, before we received such splendid help from the successive convoys of yaks, we had occasionally been obliged actually to squander our provisions, so as to diminish the loads a little, or else throw some of our stores away.

The real cause of the disease was the rarefaction of the atmosphere, which at those altitudes is only half as dense as it is down at sea-level, and the consequence is the blood does not imbibe sufficient oxygen to maintain vitality. The fact is, we were living under altogether abnormal conditions—conditions for which our respiratory and circulatory systems were neither constructed nor adapted. Irregularities occurred in their functions, and those who were not sufficiently sound and strong ran, of course, a great risk. The heart laboured under great pressure, and if its muscles and tissues were not naturally strong, it was unable to force the blood to the extremities of the body. A distinguished Swedish physician has explained to me that that was the reason why the feet and legs of my men perished first; he thought that if it had been possible to keep the patient in a perfectly horizontal position, he might perhaps have been saved. But during a caravan journey it is, of course, extremely difficult to nurse sick folk in a perfectly satisfactory manner. You ought, of course, to halt and wait until they are restored to health. But in a country like Tibet such a course would often obviously put the entire caravan in jeopardy. The traveller has no alternative except to carry his invalids with him, and that naturally taxes their strength very severely.

The yak caravan got under weigh early in the morning, with one of the Cossacks as its escort. Next followed the ailing camels and horses, all without loads. And as soon as poor old Mohammed Tokta was buried, the rest of us left that melancholy spot, carrying with us my instrument cases on two or three of the camels that were still fit for work. We were only about 480 miles from Ladak, but at the slow pace we crawled along, the road seemed interminable. The last to leave were myself, Shagdur, and Sirkin, and we rode up the slope of the mountain which rose west of our late camp, our object being to measure the height of the ancient beach-lines above the existing level of the lake. The levelling mirror was fixed at five feet above the ground, and the distance between the points observed was reduced constantly, so that the line, which I eventually obtained

Camp no. CXIV. ; the Mountains on the South Side of the Valley.

formed a parabola. The ancient beach-lines, eight in number, on the slope of a hill on the opposite side of the valley, were incomparably the most sharply and distinctly marked. But both on this and on several other occasions I satisfied myself that the beach-lines were, as a rule, much more strongly developed on the western than on the eastern slopes, indeed on the latter they were frequently absent altogether; while on the northern and southern faces they were only moderately marked. What, then, was the cause of this uniformity? There could only be one, namely, the "trade-wind," which drove the waves with considerable violence against the eastern

Lamas blowing Trumpets.

shore, effectually obliterating the beach-line; whereas the western shore was sheltered from the breakers.

The result of my measurement went to show, that the highest of the ancient beach-lines was no less than 436½ feet above the existing level of the lake. And as the area of the lake would naturally diminish in proportion as its level dropped, we must have travelled several days across the bottoms of former lakes. The mountain we measured consisted of fine-grained crystalline schist of a dark colour, though higher up it was composed of compact quartzite.

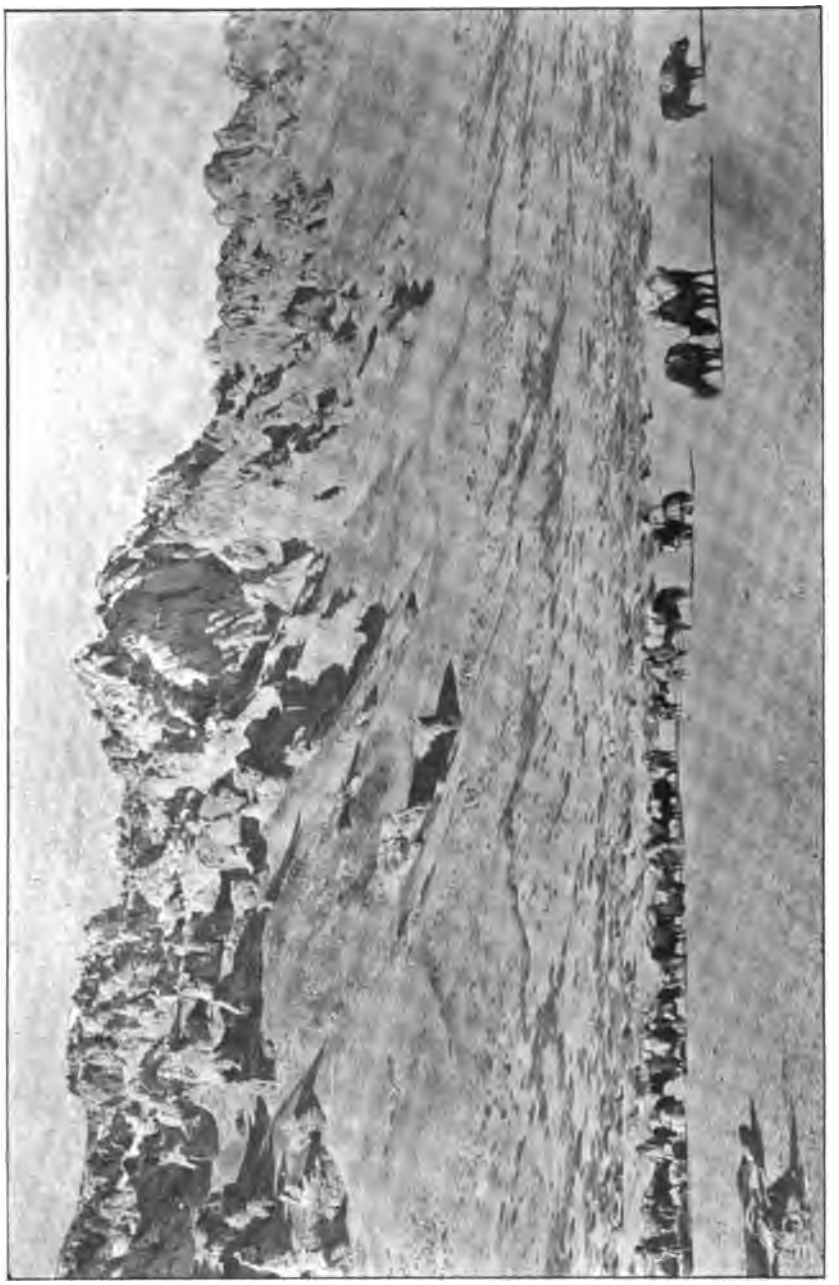
After crossing yet another little pass, we approached yet another salt lake, exactly like Lakkor-tso—the same white shores and green waters—except that it was considerably smaller. The whole of its western half was exposed, and

covered by very extensive deposits of salt as white as snow. We quitted its basin by a pass similar to that by which we approached it. Immediately below the pass we found Hamra Kul, with two dying horses. One of these, a dappled grey from Korla, I ordered him to kill at once; the other managed to struggle into camp. That journey through Tibet was an endless series of sufferings for both animals and men. Distress and pain dogged our every footstep. It was enough to make one weep tears of blood to witness so much misery, especially as we could do nothing to prevent it. Of the 45 horses and mules with which we started, we had now only 11 left.

The evenings were beginning to be cold. Kutchuk, who lived in my "kitchen," became very popular by keeping up a huge argol fire, and supplying the other men with a few embers to start their own fires with.

It was no doubt wise to make short journeys; still it was making a mockery of wisdom to restrict ourselves to such short marches as we did on the 22nd October. After about three miles the Tibetans halted, and urged us to follow their example, alleging it would be three days before we should reach grazing again; besides, that day or the next night they expected a fresh convoy of yaks to arrive, as well as some sheep. The cumulative force of these arguments being too strong, we stopped; but I gave the Tibetans to understand that when we came to reckon up, I should not count that as a complete day's work. To this they replied submissively, that I might arrange that as I pleased.

When we resumed our march we crossed the salt-pans, with their pyramids and "tables" of salt, three or four feet high, which glittered so intensely white that we were obliged to put on darkened spectacles because of the reflection. Intermingled with these was an occasional fresh-water pool, now coated with ice. Behind a mountain to the south-west, called Marmigotsong, lay the monastery of Marmi-gombo. Every now and again long-drawn trumpet blasts echoed from it and reverberated grandly amongst the mountains and across the lakes. A storm raged both that day and the day following. Even when it was dying away in the afternoon, the wind blew with a velocity of over 33½ miles an hour. Although we were still marching south-west, we were well to the south of Littledale's route. At Camp no. CXII., beside the river of Shaggueh-chu, we again heard trumpet-blasts to the south, blaring out like



Camp no. CXIV. ; the Mountains on the South Side of the Valley.

fog-horn. I was strongly tempted to visit the temple; but the Tibetans positively refused to accompany us.

On the 24th October we were again marching between wild, craggy mountain-ranges, amid scenery that was both fantastic and sublime. We encamped beside a little pool called Oman-tso, immediately below a flat-topped pass (15,814 feet), in the province of Sagghet-sang, inhabited by the Senkor tribe, a name mentioned by Littledale. Three camels lagged behind that day, and only one of the three was able to reach camp. That night the thermometer fell to −18°.8 C., or −1°.8 Fahr. Next morning, even before we got started, we found it necessary to kill another of the horses. Six of the camels were not up to the mark, and were left to follow on with the yaks, and Almaz, who was still unwell, was allowed to ride the best of them. Just as we overtook them one of the six gave up; the two men, who were left with him, being unable to get him up again, finally cut his throat. Very soon a second lagged behind, with one of the men in charge of it, and yet a third followed suit. Still further on the dromedary was left at a patch of grass, to be picked up by the party in the rear. Thus Almaz only brought in one camel with him, the mother of the foal born at Charkhlik; the foal was the best of all, but then we fed it on bread. We had only 18 camels left out of 39; all the others lay dead beside the road we had travelled. All four Cossacks were now riding on mules. The only men who rode horses were myself, Turdu Bai, Mollah Shah, Li Loyeh, and Turdu Ahun, Hamra Kul's sixteen-year old son, who acted as servant to the Mussulmans. The rest of the men sometimes rode on camels, but generally walked.

Thus decimated, we pursued our way between the immense cliffs, which overhung our route like mediæval castles suddenly converted by wizardry into stone. All the ranges wheeled towards the north-west, just as the Himalayas and the Kwen-lun do in the same meridian. That evening we again encamped beside a little frozen lake underneath a pass called Bonjin-tso. Our yak leader was one Davo Tsering, a funny, good-natured little man, who could not understand what advantage it would be to him to cheat us.

Death still continued to play havoc in the caravan. We killed one camel in the morning, and three others lagged behind during the course of the day, Turdu Bai staying with them until ten o'clock at night. He was to see after them again in

the morning, and if they were then unable to continue, he had orders to put them out of their misery. He and Sirkin, who rode back to fetch them, returned without them. One of the three was our only dromedary.

The weather still continued fine on the 27th October, and the "trade-wind" was still blowing, although not quite so violently. The route was quite level and good, and all our camels managed to do the day's march, though it was quite as much as some of the horses were able to accomplish. Some of the camels, however, were suffering from their feet, and wore stockings of kulan skin. The country soon began to open out again, and at intervals we saw nomads. Davo Tsering rode beside my bridle-rein, and, with admirable freedom from prejudice, gave me all the information I asked him for. He used to say, with all the dignity of a full-blown dominie, "Now write down that that mountain is called so-and-so." He afterwards asked the Lama on the quiet what I thought of him.

At this point our route and Littledale's separated, after having coincided for a short distance only. Beyond this the English traveller pursued a more southerly route than we did to Rudok, and then followed the southern shore of the Pang-gong-tso to Ladak. To the north-west we saw the lake of Doddap-tso; and in the locality of Na-ngamba an obo, consisting of a stone cist, 13 feet long, filled with *maneh* slabs and yaks' and sheep's horns, and bearing a little red flag on the top. Camp no. CXVI. was pitched on the western shore of the ice-clad freshwater lake of Oman-tso.

On the 28th October, we rode up and down, up and down the undulations of the surface until we reached the end of the latitudinal valley we had been traversing so long. From the pass at the end an entirely new world was opened out before us, and the old world we had known so long, and had had such bitter experiences in, closed behind us like a book. The predominant feature of the landscape before us was the circular lake of Perutseh-tso or Yim-tso. Our camp beside the Perutseh-tso was the best we had had since we left the Charkhlik-su, nearly six months before. The grass was high, thick, and tender; and there was an abundance of *balgun* bushes, so that we had no lack of good fuel; nor was there any deficiency of water. The camp soon assumed a cheerful aspect under the ring of big blazing fires the men built up, and it was not only cheerful, it was warm; and sadly we needed them, for the thermometer

Camp no. CXIV. ; the Mountains on the North Side of the Valley.

dropped to −20°.1 C., or −4°.2 Fahr. Only one camel failed to come up with the rest, and that was the mother of the foal; but when the men went back to the lake in the evening to fetch her, she was already stiff and cold. Thus there were only 14 camels left. Upon reaching camp, another of the horses died. Here Davo Tsering took his leave of us, declaring that he had no warrant to receive the present I offered him.

This made the ninth day we had travelled without giving ourselves a single day's rest. The grazing had never been good enough to tempt us; to make up for it we stayed at this camp four whole days, and all the animals picked up wonderfully. The men of the next relay of yaks sold us three small sacks of corn, brought from Ladak, for the sum of 4 *liang* (=13s.), which was, of course, too much; but although it was all gone in an hour, it did our poor beasts good. The new yak-leader told us that he was a Tajinur Mongol, and was born a few days' journey south of Kuku-nor, but his parents, whilst on their way to Lassa on a pilgrimage, sold him, when about five years of age, to a Tangut couple who were childless. How much they got for him he did not know; but our Lama said that the regulation price was 20 *liang* (=£3 6s. 8d.), and that transactions of this kind were not at all uncommon. Sometimes the Tanguts sold their children to the Mongols. Our man had, of course, been brought up as a genuine Tibetan, and did not know a single word of Mongolian.

The first day after our long rest we managed to do 16 miles, the going being level and good; in spite of that, however, one of the horses gave up soon after we started and had to be killed.

The weather was bitterly cold; to ride was like freezing us to death, the wind was so icy and so penetrating. Although the stream of the Ombo-sangpo was completely frozen over, the ice was not strong enough to bear us. The Tibetans tried it first; but when we saw how their horses and yaks slipped and slithered about, and even went through, we set to work and cut a channel through the ice for the camels. The night at Camp no. CXVIII. was gloriously bright and still; the thermometer registered −15°.4 C., or 4°.3 Fahr. Stars of even the fifth magnitude were distinctly visible on the horizon; while stars of the first magnitude glittered with the brilliancy and sparkle of diamonds. Occasionally we heard the howling of the wolves, and it was both a cold and a hungry howl.

When we got up on the morning of the 3rd November,

we found that all our camels except two had taken themselves off back to the rich pasture of Perutseh-tso, and we lost a good deal of time in fetching them back. When we were at last ready for starting, we continued west, crossing first the plainly-marked and beautifully formed ancient beaches of the lake of Luma-ring-tso, and finally the extensive salt deposits which immediately surrounded the little lake itself, which was of course salt. We encamped on the shore of the next lake, Tsolla-ring-tso, separated from Luma-ring-tso by a narrow neck of land. In spite of the intense cold, the shores of these two lakes were for the most part fenny and treacherous, owing to the presence of fresh springs. Luma-ring-tso is quite erroneously marked on Nain Singh's map. He makes it some 33 miles long, instead of which it is only about 3½ miles; but then he never saw the lake himself, for his route lay a long way to the north of it. It was not likely that it had shrunk so much since 1873, the year in which the celebrated pundit made his memorable and important journey.

As the shores were so dangerous, we thought it wiser to tether the camels at night. Two of the horses, however, walked in, and when, after a world of trouble, we succeeded in getting them out again, they looked as if they had been modelled in mire. In spite of the long rest they had recently had, several of the horses were again in a queer way. The white horse, which I rode during the latter part of the journey towards Lassa, and which seemed to be dead beaten on 19th August, but had nevertheless recovered, gave up again next day, and I was just on the point of issuing orders to kill him, when the leader of the Tibetan caravan hurried up, and begged me to give him the horse, which I, of course, readily did.

That day we should, we knew, strike the border of Rudok. In fact, at the western end of the lake there were already seven tents standing, with a number of people about them. An impudent old man came forward and said, we could not advance any farther; there was good pasture in an adjacent glen, we might go there and share it with their horses and yaks. We were encamped close to the Tibetans, and our Lama at once went off to find out what was the matter. He returned in a state of great excitement. The chief of the Rudokis was, he declared, a perfect bully: he had demanded a pass from the Dalai Lama and swore that if he did not produce one, he would not allow us to march through his territory. This Bombo, or governor, of the province was reported to be on very good terms

Our Camp beside a Frozen Marsh, in the beginning of November.

with the Devashung or Supreme Council at Lassa, and was a sort of superintendent of the gold mines of Chokk-jalung,* where he resided during the summer, though in the winter he dwelt in the town of Rudok.

I sent for the man to come and see me. He arrived with a large suite, dressed in full uniform, and his manner was extremely arrogant. I invited him to take a seat on a felt carpet which I had had spread on the ground just outside my tent, though I myself remained inside, sitting near the brazier. For a little the man hesitated whether he should accept such an ambiguous compliment or not, but finally sat down, and

The North Shore of the Lake of Tsolla-ring-tso.

demanded to see our pass from the Dalai Lama. I answered, that we had never seen that magnate, and consequently could not very well bear any pass from him.

"I have not heard a word about you," he went on, "nor do I know who you are. I have had no report about you from Lassa, and I have no orders to furnish you with yaks. But I do know this, that Europeans are under no circumstances allowed to travel through Rudok."

* This was a place situated two or three days' journey south-west of the locality where we just then were. In the winter the mines are said to be almost deserted, though in summer 300 men are wont to gather there from all quarters, some of them coming all the way from Lassa. Chokk-jalung is considered to be the highest place in the world that is inhabited all the year round.

"If you are a high official, you ought to know it is your bounden duty to help us on our way to Ladak."

"I owe no obligation to suspicious personages, who carry no pass; but, if you like, I will write to Lassa, and you can wait here ten weeks until the answer comes back."

"Capital," I answered; "that will suit us splendidly; our animals are thoroughly exhausted and want rest. Write to Lassa by all means; we have plenty of time to spare."

"Very good. You understand that if I let you go through my province I shall lose my head?"

The man's manner was calm, dignified, and decided; but, as compared with our friends near Lassa, he was at the same time nothing short of impudent. The Cossacks were simply boiling with rage; they were longing to get home, or rather were dying to get away from that cold, windy, mountainous region. However, I calmed them down, for I realised that I had no right whatever to wage war upon Rudok. Besides, our opponents were too strong for us; even now they mustered more than 100 well-armed men. On the other hand, I did not want to be driven farther north, for I should there come into contact with one or other of the routes of Nain Singh, Capt. Bower, Capt. Deasy, or Capt. Wellby and Lieut. Malcolm. Still less did I wish to be forced to do as Capt. Deasy once did, burn the greater part of my baggage, tents, stores, and boat.

On the contrary, I rather welcomed the prospect of a 2½ months' delay. I was utterly worn out, and greatly in need of rest. So I took counsel with the Cossacks, and we soon arranged a plan for the winter. In two or three days' time we would go back to the rich pastures of the Perutseh-tso, and there construct a fortified camp. The locality was so interesting that I should never be at a loss for occupation, and the men would find plenty to do at first in building a high turf wall all round the encampment, and in digging a moat all round outside it. Then they might erect an outlook tower of the same materials. Then we would have a rest, we would hunt, make excursions, and nurse up our animals again, and when spring came would push out due south. I almost blessed the over-zealous Bombo for forcing me to enter into fresh plans with regard to Tibet, although in point of fact I had already had more than enough of that inaccessible country.

Next morning I announced to the chief our intention to return to the east, and he offered no objection. On the other

A Scene in Western Tibet.

hand, the Tajinur yak-caravan man declared that his orders were to convey us to the boundary of Rudok, not eastwards; but I saw a way by which that difficulty might be overcome. Meanwhile, however, the Bombo changed his mind, and informed us that he would procure us both yaks and provisions, if we would promise not to go near the town of Rudok. To this I readily agreed, for I had no intention of going to Rudok; that town lay on the route which Littledale had followed. After that we of course dropped the plan of the fortified camp, and prepared to resume our journey.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

TSO-NGOMBO OR THE BLUE LAKE.

HERE we put aside everything we could possibly do without and gave them to the Tibetans, and on the 6th November climbed over a pass (15,940 feet high), and found springs and grass on its north face. On the 7th the weather was splendid, and we were mercifully spared the annoyance of the incessant wind. But by way of a diversion the Tibetans began to squabble with our Lama, calling him a "dog of a heathen" for trailing about with "those Russian fellows." Our Lama grew so angry that he laid about him with his whip, and I bade him tell them that if they kicked up a row again, we would tie them fast on the camels' backs until they were "sea-sick"—and polite. We never saw a soul all day, nothing except a few old camp-fires. At night we encamped beside the spring of Tsebu. Silent—silent as the grave it was that night; I almost fancied I could hear the prickling of the intense cold as the frost fastened itself into the ground. Except for the long-drawn, melancholy howls of two or three wolves, the eerie stillness of the night was unbroken, for you could scarcely count the monotonous echo of our night-watchman's footsteps as he made his cold, weary rounds.

During the two following days we rode alongside a lake, which swarmed with wild geese and wild duck, then over a low pass into the deeply-eroded bed of the Ravur-sangpo, which had its origin in natural springs, and disappeared in the large valley that lay at our feet. The leader of the yak-caravan told us that the vicinity of Aru-tso, a lake situated four days' journey to the north, and mentioned by Captain Bower, was haunted by robbers from Amdo, Nakkchu, and Nakktsong. The year before a band of five had been seized at Ravur-sangpo, and put to death by command of the chief of Rudok. Except for those men the district was uninhabited. Our informant was a jocular old man: he used to ride beside me singing, and would often delight my men by imitating the gurgling of the camels.

On the 10th of November the thermometer registered −26°.5 C., or −15°.7 Fahr. We lay rolled up like mummies in our sheep-skins and furs, but even then we were unable to keep warm. We did twenty miles—quite a feat for us; we had not done anything like it for weeks. Our satellites wanted of course to stop and rest after we had gone six miles; but as we were just then met by a fresh relay of men and yaks we let the first lot go. We could not very well blame them for wanting to get home and inside their warm tents as soon as they could, the poor beggars were not blessed with inexpressibles! Leaving Cherdon and three of the Mussulmans, and all the Tibetans

Our Lama Quarrelling with the Leaders of the Yak-Caravan.

except four, to look after the yak-caravan, the rest of us rode on. We traversed a level valley. The day passed, it grew twilight; it was dark—not a drop of water all day! At length we met Shagdur, who had ridden on ahead to reconnoitre, returning with a little sack of ice. We continued as far as the frozen brook from which he obtained it. Li Loyeh, who had also been out in another direction, shot a wolf.

On the 12th the Tibetans put up their tents at the western end of a small lake which was covered with a thick coating of ice, alleging "there would be no water again for two days." We filled four sacks with good ice, and disregarding their energetic protests, calmly pursued our way. Whilst engaged at the lake we had observed two or three horses and men on a hillside a

few miles to the north; but when we reached the spot they had disappeared. Our Tibetans asserted that they were robbers and had hidden themselves in some ravine, and they urged us to rout them out and shoot them. Shortly after that we perceived two more sitting round a fire, roasting a joint from an orongo antelope. They were simply peaceful, inoffensive hunters, nothing more. About an hour later we halted, and up came the yak-caravan, with its whistling, singing escort, and Shagdur carrying on a lively and playful conversation with them. The clever fellow had in a surprisingly short time picked up sufficient Tibetan to be able to talk fluently with the men of our succes-

View South-east from Camp no. CXXIX.

sive convoys. The yak-men were quite right. It *was* two days before we found water again, in a garrulous little stream. Had it not been for the information which the Tibetans gave us we should very often have been hard put to it for water. During the night of the 13th–14th November it froze sharp at the sides of the stream. It was become a rare thing for us to hear the sound of running water. What a contrast there was between this region and the country towards Lassa. There it poured with rain almost every day, and we ploughed our way through what was little better than a morass; here we actually had to hunt for water.

Next day we rode some distance up beside the Raga-sangpo, and then turned away from it to the right. Soon after that the

Tibetans wanted to stop as usual, although we had only done a very short march. They were to be relieved there, they said, by another convoy, and it would be as much as their lives were worth to go farther than they were ordered to go. I simply put the yaks in the hands of my Cossacks, with instructions to drive them on to our next encampment. The Tibetans meekly followed, and came and encamped beside us. There we rested two days, and bought sheep and milk from the nomads.

On the 17th November we travelled north-west up a valley, which eventually contracted into a narrow and picturesque gorge; this was littered with gravel, and terminated in a pass,

Vicinity of our Camp of 21st and 22nd November.

with a frozen pool. There the dun horse which Chernoff had brought from Keriya died. At nine a.m. the thermometer stood at − 18°.6 C., or − 1°.5 Fahr.; while at midnight it was − 24°.4 C., or − 11°.9Fahr. Stinging cold, as well as inhospitable, amongst these dreary, desolate Tibetan mountains!

The last of the little camel foals was unable to reach Camp no. CXXX. (altitude, 16,602 feet). He fell, and we had to kill him. The little beast never throve after his mother died, even though we took the utmost care of him, feeding him upon bread and paste and milk, and keeping him well wrapped up at night, close beside the camp-fire. The hardiest and most enduring of our animals were the two sheep—Vanka, the ram,

which had accompanied us for over two years, and a white one from Abdall. None of the men had the heart to touch them; they looked upon them as comrades, and would, I verily believe, have perished of hunger sooner than kill them.

At our next camp, Yam-garavo, there was an abundance of excellent, dry yappkak, which proved extremely welcome for fuel, especially as during the night the thermometer dropped to −26°.5 C., or −15°.7 Fahr. It was positive cruelty to the men who were out watching our animals; their sheep-skins were nothing like sufficient to keep out the cold. However, at this place at all events, they were able to indulge in the luxury of a

Terraces of Gravel-and-Shingle.

fire all night. All day we had to fight against a murderous wind, which penetrated to our very marrow, for the thermometer never rose above −4°.0 C., or 24°.8 Fahr. We were absolutely forced to walk sometimes to keep from freezing, although it was terrible work for the heart and lungs, except when going down the declivities. At this camp another horse died. Poor beasts! their lives were simply a burden to them, and they themselves nothing but a source of trouble to us; but so long as there existed any hope we did not like to kill them, or even abandon them.

Still amidst a chaos of mountains! On our left, that is, to the south, we still had the imposing range which had accompanied us all the way from Nakktsong-tso, and hid from our sight

the "Forbidden Land of the Holy Books." Yet although we were thus surrounded on all sides by gigantic mountains, snow-fields were a comparative rarity, and not a flake fell. We were simply panting for a good fall of snow; we were tired to death of the everlasting wind and the bright sky. We were still 240 miles from Leh. Everybody was longing to get there, especially myself, for I wanted, if it was at all possible, to despatch a telegram to my people in Stockholm before Christmas Eve.

During the night of the 20th–21st November the thermometer dropped to −28°.2 C., or −18°.8 Fahr. Next day we did 17½ miles, but in the evening had to fetch ice some distance with the

Open Country at Tsangar-shar.

yaks, and then melt it over the fire before we could obtain water. That night we were kept awake by a dozen wolves which howled dismally all round our encampment, and were answered by our dogs.

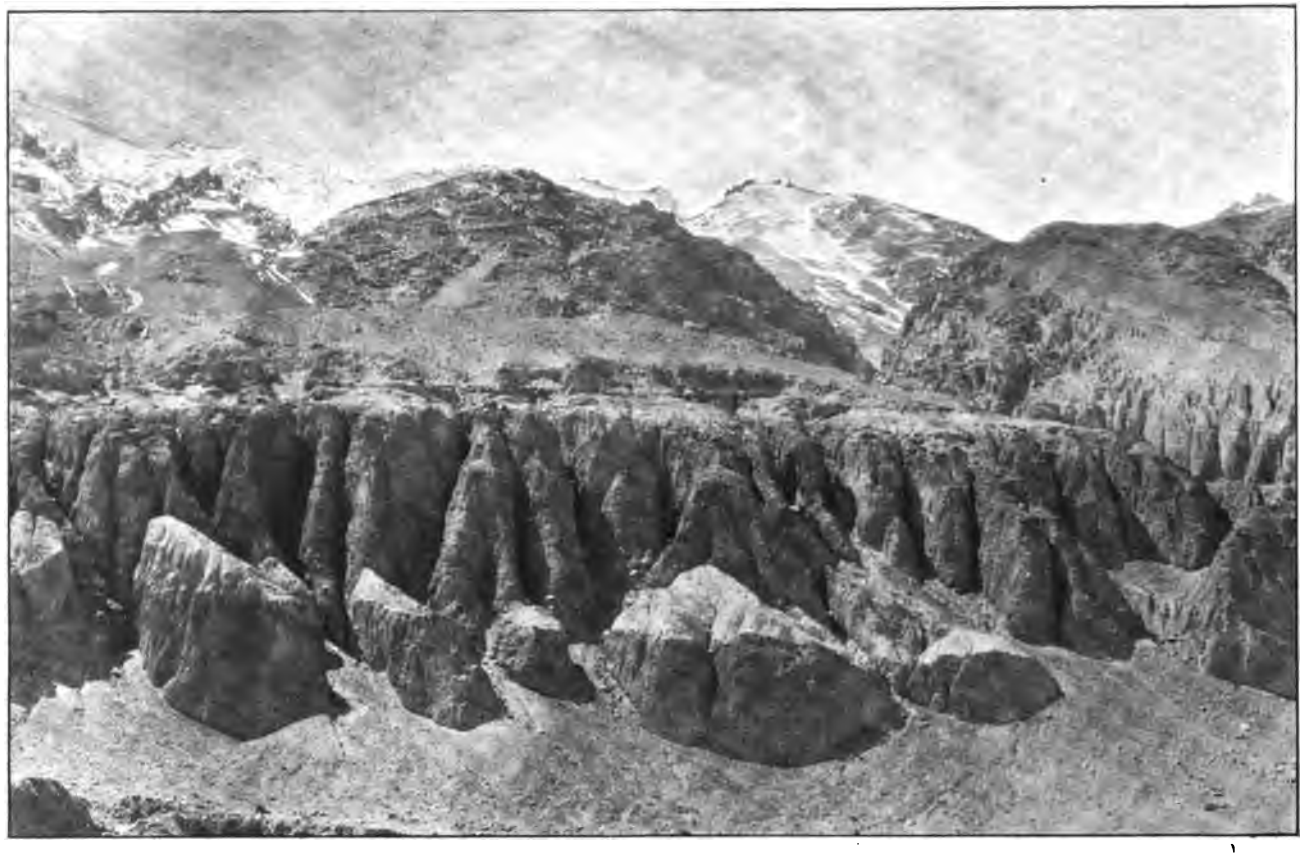
On the 23rd November we lost another camel, so that we had only thirteen left, or exactly one-third of the number with which we started from Charkhlik. The last to succumb was one of the veterans from Kashgar, which had accompanied us across the Desert of Cherchen, and both times to Altimish-bulak. Our route now lay intermediate between the route of Captain Bower and the route of Nain Singh. Upon reaching Tsangar-shar the valley which we had been following opened out, and tents and

flocks appeared in several directions. Here we picked up a fresh convoy of yaks, the leader of which was a fine old fellow. He undertook to guide us to Panggong-tso and along its northern shore; and I promised to give him a revolver if he did not lie more than he possibly could help. "I am too old to lie!" was his simple rejoinder.

For some days we travelled beside the river Tsangar-shar, which abounded in fish. Shagdur and Chernoff especially distinguished themselves as anglers, and time after time brought me a bunch of beautiful fish, frozen as hard as a stone. Although at first tolerably open, the valley soon contracted, and began to pick its way between picturesque crags and immense terraces of gravel-and-shingle. The river was sometimes open, but more frequently covered with a thick sheet of ice, which only needed sanding to convert it into a very serviceable bridge for our camels. In one place the stream widened out into a lake, which filled the valley from side to side, except for a narrow strip of firm ground on the north, only just wide enough to allow the camels to pass. Almost immediately below this lake the river emerged into daylight from underneath its icy coverlet, and there we pitched our tents. I am very fond of hearing the sweet, refreshing tinkle of running water.

That evening we had the privilege of witnessing a beautiful scene. The moon rode high and poured down a flood of vivid light, bringing out with great distinctness every detail of the spur of the mountains; owing to the dazzling sunshine and intense shadows we had been unable to distinguish them clearly during the day. Now, however, every triangular snowfield and every feature of the bold rock sculptoring stood out in the sharpest and vividest relief.

Here one of Kamba Bombo's horses went and blundered into the river, and we had great difficulty in getting him out again. I had him dried beside a big fire, and then swathed in felts, but he died within a couple of hours. Next morning Li Loyeh's horse was discovered to have died during the night. They found him lying between the tents, blown out and frozen hard. We had believed that if any horse survived the journey it would be Li Loyeh's, because of the care which its owner bestowed upon it, though he now confided to us the fact that he had never paid for it. Not far from our next camping-ground Turdu Bai's old black horse died; and during the day's march the last also of our Tibetan horses. Four all at one swoop! Thus of the



Double Terraces of Gravel-and-Shingle.

horses with which we started from Charkhlik, as well as of those we acquired on the road, we had left only one, namely, the big white animal that I was riding.

It is, indeed, a most serious undertaking to keep together a big caravan in Tibet. Travelling in that country is nothing like so easy a business as people think ; nor is there any pleasure associated with it. You travel so many miles at the cost of so many lives, men, horses and camels ; and it is not without reason that we mark travellers' routes red on our maps—their journeys have been made at the price of blood. Were I to put a red cross on my map at every spot where a life was

The Cossacks Angling on the March.

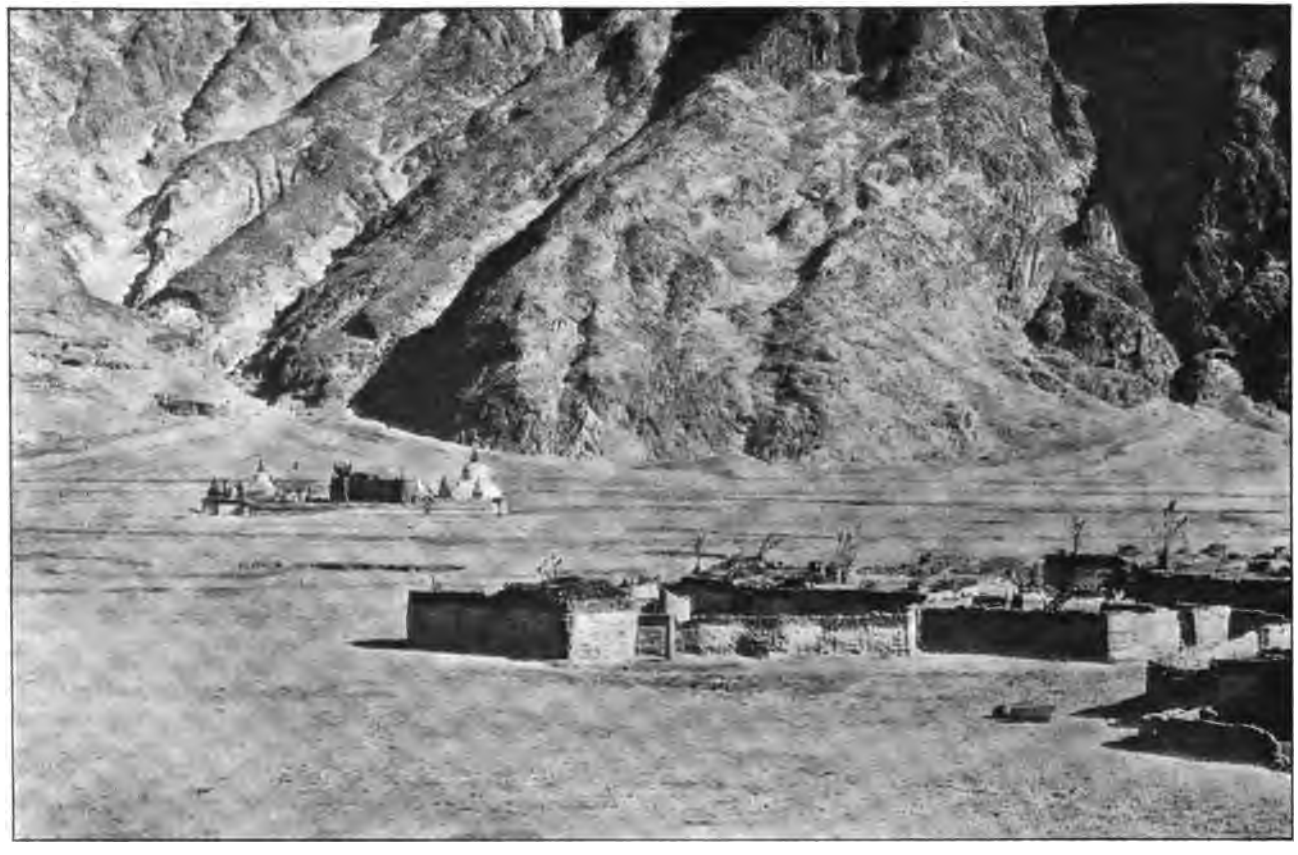
lost, it would be easy to trace the route of my caravans across the centre of Asia.

Those who, from the advantage of a comfortable easy-chair and a warm fire, sit in judgment upon a journey of this description, and weigh up its results, may readily acquire some conception, though only a very faint one, of what a journey through Tibet is like without going all the way to Tibet. They have only to travel in the depth of winter a few score miles away from their own doorstep, along a country where there are no roads or paths, with a temperature of twenty degrees below zero Fahr., and ride a horse that stumbles at every step, and when they stop at night, sleep in a cold, fireless tent, with the wolves howling

all round them in the sheer, unconquerable wilderness. Yet even that would be infinitely short of what Tibet is like; but it would, perhaps, be sufficient to make such people a little more charitable in the opinions they pronounce. For my part, I would rather cross the Desert of Gobi a dozen times than travel through Tibet once again in winter. It is impossible to form any conception of what it is like: it is a veritable *via dolorosa!*

Compared with these formidable difficulties of the road, the country and the climate, the disputes and differences which are inevitable in a caravan composed of men of different races and different creeds, are positively mere trifles. To expect Mussulmans, Tibetans, Mongols, Buriats, and Christians to work harmoniously together under all the vicissitudes of such a journey would be to expect the impossible. One night it happened that Li Loyeh and Ördek, when keeping watch together, visited the Tibetans in their tent to smoke opium. Next morning the Tibetans came to our Lama and complained that after the two men had gone they missed a stick of opium worth ten liang (= about 3Is.), and accused them of stealing it. The Lama hesitated to trouble me with such a small matter, but as they were very insistent, he at length did report it. I at once sent Chernoff and Shagdur to examine and overhaul the baggage of the two suspected men, and to search their clothes from top to toe; but no opium was found upon them, and we drove the Tibetans away, saying they lied. Li Loyeh and Ördek were, of course, hotly incensed with the Lama for having reported the matter, and determined to be revenged upon him, and this is the way they set about it. They went and persuaded Sirkin that the Lama had bribed them to make me believe that Kalpet's death was due to Sirkin's ill-treatment. Sirkin, as may readily be imagined, was perfectly astounded at this unwarranted and unjust accusation, and at once came and complained to me. Now, it was neither an easy nor an agreeable thing to disentangle a petty intrigue like this with calmness and sound judgment, especially when my teeth were chattering with cold in the early hours of the morning. Somebody was, of course, bound to be dissatisfied. When I look back upon all the difficulties which beset my path, I am amazed at my success in bringing even the shattered remnants of my caravan out of that land of woe to the comparatively sunny tracts from which the waters stream amain to the warmer climes of the Indian Ocean.

Still proceeding down beside the Tsangar-shar, we soon had



The Temple-Village of Noh.

actual proof that we were descending to lower altitudes, for on 27th November we encamped at only 14,368 feet above the sea. We still lived to a great extent upon fish. Chernoff and Shagdur vied with one another in their efforts at catching them: they harpooned the fish with their sabres and with Tibetan lances as they marched along. On one occasion Shagdur contrived to give himself a thorough ducking in the icy-cold water; venturing too far out upon the ice, his mule went through with him. Fortunately, I happened to be not far away, and built up a big, roaring fire, and made him warm himself and dry his

Our First Encampment beside the Tso-ngombo.

clothes. Otherwise, he was so reckless and hardened, he would have continued as if nothing had happened.

At length the craggy barrier which we had hitherto had on our left hand came to an end, and the river took a sharp turn to the south, just at the spot where the temple-village of Noh, called also Ojang, stood on the left bank. The buildings included a very picturesque little temple in red and white, adorned with bulbed cupolas, flags, gilded pinnacles, and other ornamental appendages. The houses were built four-square, with flat roofs, and were as a rule surrounded by white-washed walls, with red edgings at the top. They also were decorated with flag-poles and streamers. The floor was covered with felt carpets; the smoke escaped by a hole in the roof; and outside were big piles

of wood stacked up for the winter. Our Tibetans told us before we reached the temple that nobody was permitted to touch this wood; it was the lamas' property. Bathed as it was in bright sunshine, Noh presented quite a pretty picture, with the bifurcation of the stupendous mountains for its background.

The gravel-and-shingle terraces approached quite close to the left bank, and it was not easy to guide the camels over them without immersing them in the deep, cold water. We were travelling west, but still along the foot of the cliffs, where the springs yielded water with a temperature of 15°.9 C., or 60°.6 Fahr. A low pass, marked by a cairn with flags stuck on the

View S. across the Second Lake of Tso-ngombo.

top of it, brought us out above the eastern end of the lake of Tso-ngombo. Beyond it on the south were several pyramidal peaks capped with snow, while westwards stretched the lake with its capricious outlines—creeks, bays, capes, islands, and steep, craggy shores. It was, however, only a few miles wide. We encamped close down beside the lake on a level shelf, where there was a little grass. A caravan of sheep from Ladak was already resting there, but at our approach they moved on. About half a mile from our camp was a little islet with plenty of good fuel. Our Tibetans spent the night there, for it afforded them shelter as well as an abundance of firing—as indeed it did us—and in the evening their immense fires flung a fiery-red glare across

the glittering ice. All night the ice cracked and groaned from the tension it was labouring under, until it sounded like a foghorn blown now from one quarter, now from another. A well-spring kept open several holes in the ice close to the island, and there we caught a number of fish.

Next day we gave ourselves a rest, and measured the depth of the lake between the shore and the island; the maximum was 20¾ feet. The leader of our yak-caravan announced that he was ordered to despatch a courier to Leh, so that when we reached the frontier of Tibet and Kashgar we might find everything we needed ready waiting for us. I seized the opportunity

The Middle Basin of Tso-ngombo.

to send a letter to the British Joint Commissioner for Ladak, with the request that he would forward succours of yaks, horses, and provisions. When the messenger disappeared in the darkness on his little, long-haired steed, I confess I did not envy him his ride, and particularly so when next day we saw the path he had ridden along.

On the 30th November, whilst the men who travelled on foot struck diagonally across the ice, the rest of us had an interesting march along the north shore of the lake. This last consisted of four distinct basins, connected by short rivers. The stream which connected the second basin—itself icebound, like the first—with the third basin, was as level and regular as an

artificial canal, about forty feet broad and not deeper than ten feet. Its water, which flowed extremely slowly, was of an emerald-green colour and as bright as crystal. The bottom was covered with aquatic vegetation, and shoals of black-backed fish, with their noses pointing indolently and carelessly up-stream, hung in the deeper pools. The fourth basin, which was the biggest, extended a long way towards the west and north-west, and was entirely free from ice, a fact probably due to its great depth. It was shut in by high, rugged mountains, amongst which the camels' bells echoed melodiously, frightening the flocks of wild-duck which rocked on the curling waves. The

A View of the Western Tso-ngombo.

shore was strewn with fragments of rock and beset with steep, gravelly screes, making it very difficult for the camels to advance. We encamped the first night at a spot called Bal; and from Noh to Bal our route coincided with that of Nain Singh, though at the latter place we left it again. During the march we met a caravan of 200 sheep, laden with corn from Ladak. It was quite a pleasure to see how orderly they marched and how easy they were to manage; and no slope was too steep for them, although they bore quite heavy loads. The Tibetans carry on a considerable trade across the frontier of Kashmir, bartering 100 sheep, laden with salt, for 80 sheeploads of corn. At Bal the thermometer went down to $-20°.9$ C., or $-5°.6$ Fahr., during

the night; and before morning a terrific storm swept over us from the north.

On the 1st December we were obliged to kill another of our camels, though it was hard to put an end to our veterans now we were so near to the end of the journey. We kept close to the lake shore, following faithfully all its windings, although that frequently took us over very difficult gravel terraces. This last division of the lake was long and narrow, and resembled a Norwegian fjord. As we advanced between the precipitous and broken cliffs which shut it in on both sides, one magnificent mountain scene after another unrolled itself before our eyes, over-

A Difficult Bit beside the Tso-ngombo.

topped at intervals by some dominating snowy peak. The waters literally swarmed with wild-duck, and became churned into white foam when the birds, startled by our advance, skimmed along and settled farther out in the lake. The surface was quite free from ice, except for a few thin, ragged patches in the sheltered creeks and corners. We counted five distinct beach-lines; the lowest, which was very deeply incised, formed a shelf along the side of the precipice. Finally, however, the mountains receded and left room for a beach of level but soft ground.

An hour later we reached the first of certain specially difficult places of which we had been forewarned—namely, a rocky

headland, which plunged sheer down into the lake. That evening the men carried over all the baggage on their shoulders, and next morning the animals were piloted past the headland one by one without their loads, first the mules and horses, and then the camels. The yaks, however, preferred to climb over the dangerous acclivities.

Next morning just before sunrise a curious phenomenon appeared on the opposite, or south-east, shore. The lake "smoked"; that is to say, dense clouds of chalky white steam rose up off the water and spread themselves out over its surface. Whether these were caused by warm springs, or were simply due to the fact that the surface of the lake was warmer than the atmosphere, I do not know. The thermometer dropped to −18°.3 C., or −0°.9 Fahr., and the temperature of the water was two or three degrees above freezing-point. But shortly after the sun rose the mist dispersed.

The breadth of Tso-ngombo varied, of course, according to the configuration of the inclosing mountains. Although some of the men went on first to level the road by filling up holes and toppling loose blocks of rock into the lake, we nevertheless experienced a good deal of trouble in clearing the worst places. One of the most difficult was a steep scree littered with big fragments of rock, where the instrument cases kept catching against the stones, until we at last unloaded them and carried them ourselves.

Camp no. CXLI. was pitched beside the encampment of a sheep-caravan, consisting of two black tents, surrounded by the animals' loads and stacks of wood. Here I measured the height of the former beach-lines: the highest was 64 feet, the lowest 14¾ feet, above the existing level of the lake.

On the 3rd of December I sent Chernoff across the lake in the skiff to sound the depth along a line which I had previously marked out for him: the soundings gave 98½ feet. Meanwhile I and Cherdon rode along the shore until we came to a sound or strait, some 550 yards across, and frozen over. There we waited for the boat. We had been told that before the day was over we should come to a perpendicular cliff which it would be absolutely impossible for the camels to get over. Finding this little sound frozen, it occurred to me that we might take the whole caravan across to the south side of the lake, and so avoid the difficulty. Chernoff examined the ice to see if it would bear; but to make quite sure, we chopped holes in it—

it was 5¼ to 6 inches thick. (At the same time we sounded a maximum depth of 96¼ feet.) We continued our investigations a considerable distance along the south side of the lake without discovering any obstacle. Meanwhile the caravan had come to a standstill and was waiting. Still, not satisfied, I put Ördek ashore, bidding him light a fire if he should come to a place it would be impossible for the camels to get past. On our way back to the caravan, we perceived no less than three fires blazing along the shore we had just left. There was no help for it then; we must proceed as best we could by the northern shore. When Chernoff rowed across to fetch back Ördek, he again sounded

The Dangerous Path Along the Mountain Side; some of the Yaks on the Path, Others Above it.

the lake, and obtained a maximum depth of 97½ feet. From this I inferred that it was traversed throughout its entire length by a trough or trench about 100 feet deep.

Turdu Bai now went to examine the difficult place which prevented our advance, and reported that he did not see how the camels could any way be got past it in safety. Now seeing that the region was so well stocked with plenty of strong dry timber and brushwood, I determined to make a ferry-boat, and, binding it together with our camels' pack-saddles and ropes, see if we could not in that way carry the entire caravan past the obstacle. I hoped we could make a ferry-boat big enough to bear at least one camel. At any rate, it *must* do, for I did not intend

to go back to Bal, and from there travel in Nain Singh's footsteps to Niagsu. If only the ice had borne just round that tiresome promontory! But no, it was open water, said Turdu Bai.

However, that night we had some 36° of frost (Fahr.), and next morning large areas, which the night before had been open water, were coated over with ice. I at once sent off every man who could be spared to gather wood to make the ferry-boat, and when we reached the spot we found a big stack ready waiting for us. There was ice even round the dangerous impediment, though it was barely 1⅛ inches thick. As soon as the tents were pitched, Sirkin and two or three other men climbed up to have a look at the promontory from the top. Their opinions were divided: Sirkin thought that the passage could be managed, if we cautiously steered the camels over one by one. Then I went and examined it myself; it was nothing short of suicide to attempt it. The smooth black slates sloped down into the lake at an angle of 43°. It is true there was a sort of path, consisting of flat slates laid along a kind of shelf, and held up on the outer side by poles and logs as much as six or seven feet long, but none of them looked to me strong enough to bear the weight of a camel. Sometimes, too, the path zigzagged up and down the break-neck declivities; most of our tired camels would assuredly have lost their heads, and turned giddy, and rolled down into the lake.

No; either we must build the ferry-boat and break the thin ice, or we must wait until the ice was thick enough to bear us. As the thermometer at one p.m. was already down to −4°.5 C., or 23°.9 Fahr., I hoped that the last eventuality would come to pass. At six p.m. the ice was no less than two inches thick. The Cossacks set to work to construct a make-shift sledge of pack-saddles, tent-poles, timber, and ropes, and covered it all over with felts. This was Shagdur's idea; if the ice should not prove strong enough for the camels to walk round, we could perhaps haul them past the cliff on the sledge.

The wind whistled through the bushes and crevices, roaring for all the world like a gale sweeping through one of our Swedish forests. The ice was growing stronger every hour. It now bore three men, whereas in the morning it would barely support one. We resolved to try our ferry-boat, by packing into it as many men as would together be equal to the weight of a camel. Then two other men started to drag it sledgewise round the pro-

Carrying the Baggage across the Ice on a Make-shift Sledge.

Lama, then I followed him, then Tokta Ahun, and so on, according as the ice grew thinner and thinner. As each deserter hopped off, he was greeted with salvoes of laughter from the heroes who remained. The ice was bright and glassy, and without a bleb; we could distinctly see the fish darting in and out amongst the aquatic plants at the bottom. Every now and then there was a rumbling along it as if somebody were firing cannon, and the sound died away slowly, slowly, a long way down the lake. We saw we should have to wait another day, to give the ice time to form.

During the next 36 hours we studied the thermometer with

Converting the Skiff into a Sledge.

the keenest interest. That night it recorded −19°.3 C., or −2°.4 Fahr.; at seven o'clock the next morning −11°.1 C., or 12°.1 Fahr.; at one p.m. −5°.1 C., or 22°.8 Fahr.; at nine p.m. −8°.9 C., or 16°.0 Fahr.; and during the night of the 5th-6th December, −20°.9 C., or −5°.6 Fahr. I got up an hour before daybreak to take an astronomical observation. As soon as that was concluded, the men carried all our baggage except my own tent and the cooking-tent round the promontory on the sledge. The ice was now three-quarters of an inch thicker. Meanwhile, the yaks climbed over the top of it; but then they are marvellously sure-footed creatures. They may slip, but they never lose their foothold. Still their owners were obliged to exercise

the utmost vigilance to prevent them from horning one another over the precipice.

Chernoff once more sounded the depth of the lake, being drawn across it by Ördek and Khodai Kullu in one-half of the skiff, converted for the nonce into a hand sledge. The former dropped through and only just managed to save himself by clinging to the edge of the boat. The maximum depth was 70¾ feet; and the excursion showed that relatively warm springs must gush up near the southern shore.

Before we got round that troublesome promontory we lost yet another camel, thus leaving us with only ten. The ice was now 3¾ inches thick, and first thing in the morning we strewed 28 sackfuls of sand on the surface to prevent the camels from slipping, and then made haste to lead them round before the sun got up. The passage was accomplished without mishap. After that we fetched round the remainder of the baggage; and, having loaded up, once more pursued our way west. The track led round dangerous headlands, across small expanses of drift sand, and alongside regularly rounded bays. I myself walked all day long, for my horse was, like all the rest, in not very good trim. This part of the lake was quite open; evidently the formation of the ice advanced from the east towards the west.

Once more the Tso-ngombo narrowed, and at length it terminated, except that its fresh water was carried on further into the salt lake of Panggong-tso by the river Aji-tsonyak. On the northern bank of this stream, shortly after it quitted the former lake, we encamped for the night. I shall not readily forget the sublime beauty of that wild Tibetan lake, with its imposing dimensions and steep crags, peeping over one another's shoulders to mirror themselves in its silvery water, or the pure, glassy brightness of its ice.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

FROM THE PANGGONG-TSO TO LEH.

CAMP no. CXLIV., which was exactly one hundred days from our main camp in the mountains, was not altogether without importance. We had been told, that we were to be met there by a fresh relay of yaks from Ladak. But we saw nothing of them; and as the Tibetans wanted to go home, we had to keep an eye upon them to prevent them.

On the 7th December we encountered an ugly storm, which smothered us with sand. Chernoff went out in the skiff, and sounded the western end of the lake along four lines, the maximum depth he obtained being 104¼ feet. There was an abundance of vegetation in the lake. It discharged a volume of not more than 133½ cubic feet in the second. We had intended starting again on the 9th; but found that all the yaks had run away, and their trail was obliterated by a fresh storm, so that we did not find them again until towards the close of the day. Their leader, Loppsen, by name, agreed, however, to accompany us along the northern shore of the Panggong-tso, until we met the relief column from Ladak. It was high time we had succour; our supply of rice, flour and talkan had come to an end several days before, and we were living exclusively upon meat, having bought seven sheep at a neighbouring encampment. It was there Yolldash made some especial friends, so that we had to tie him up to prevent him from running away. The highest beach-line that we measured near the camp was 177 feet above the level of the river. It was evident, that the two lakes had formerly been connected, and, like all the other lakes in Tibet, were undergoing desiccation.

We started again on the 10th December; and whilst the caravan travelled along the north shore of the Panggong-tso, I and Ördek rowed down the river. The stream moved almost imperceptibly, keeping close to the foot of the mountains on the south. The temperature had dropped to −25°.7 C., or − 14°.3

Fahr., yet the river was not frozen; whence I inferred there must have been some warm springs somewhere thereabouts. According to the high water marks, this branch of the river must have carried some 370 cubic feet of water in the summer, or three times as much as it measured at the date of our visit. Lower down the lake was completely covered with ice, except for one narrow strip of green-blue water. The river must have spread itself out over the top of the salt water.

After that we crossed over to the mountains on the north side of the valley. They consisted of green and black schists, and several springs trickled out at their foot. There we were

The Skiff on Lake Panggong-tso

able to command an uninterrupted view of the lake. The configuration of its shore-line was the same as that of the Tsongombo. There were the same spurs jutting out into the same capes, and enclosing between them the same small triangular or crescentic patches of level ground, with sparse scrub. The stones at the foot of the screes along the margin of the water were coated with a layer of white ice, full of bubbles. This was due to the impact of the waves upon the shore, for the spray froze immediately it touched the ice-cold rock. We found the caravan comfortably established on a flat peninsula called Siriap, where bushes were very plentiful.

Next day, the 11th of December, it was so still and fine that

Gulang Hiraman and his Ladakis.

I sent my two best boatmen, Chernoff and Ördek, to row south-west across the Panggong-tso and sound its depth. In case they should not be able to reach the next camp before dark, they took provisions with them to last for a day. The sky was covered with heavy black clouds, so that there was a sort of twilight all day; and the mountains all round were shrouded in fresh fallen snow. Our route was almost doubled in length by the peculiar "festooning" of the lake shore. Every spur or offshoot of the main range ended in a peninsula or headland, jutting out across the lake; and in some places the passages round the promontories were so difficult that we had to level them down with spades and pickaxes before the camels would face them. In one place the strip of shore only just afforded room for one sheep to pass, though fortunately the lake at that spot was not deep, so that the camels were able to get round it in the water. Although snail-shells had been numerous further east, where the fresh water issued from the Tso-ngombo, here they existed in far less quantity.

At our next camping-ground, where the drinking water was very little better than that of the lake, we were reduced to gathering the ice off the stones on the shore. At dusk we discovered that the camels had gone back, but we found them at the narrow passage I have just mentioned, for they had forgotten that just there they had gone through the water. They were trying to get back to the rich pasture beside the Tso-ngombo. After that we kept them tied up, and gave them a good feed of corn.

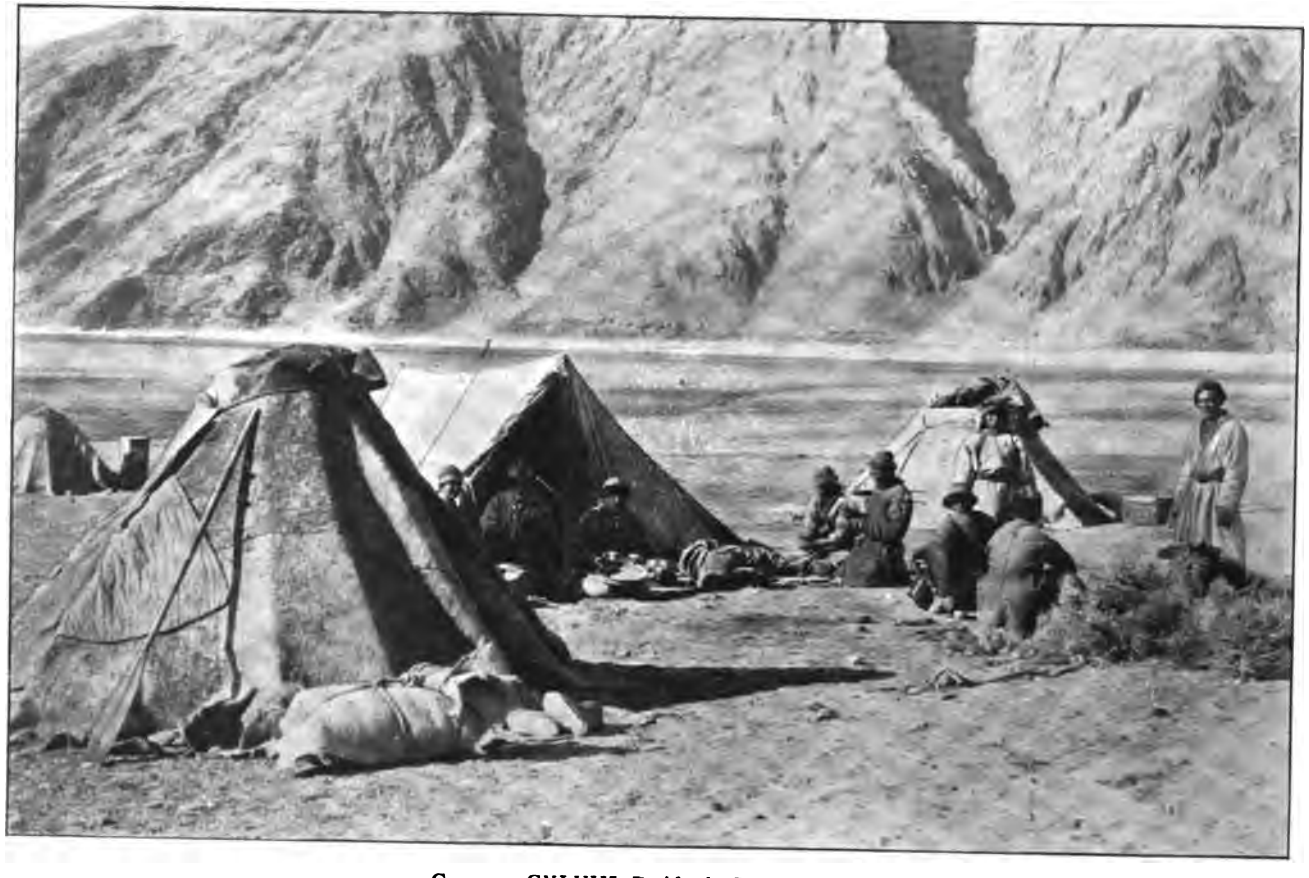
Next day, although the thermometer did not drop below $-7°.5$ C., or $18°.5$ Fahr., the entire neighbourhood was enveloped in a blinding snowstorm, so that we were unable to obtain even a glimpse of the southern shore. The lake ran exceedingly high, for the wind, being forced through the long narrow valley, swept across it unhindered with redoubled vehemence. We only did a short stage, but it was more difficult than any we had yet made beside this series of lakes. The difficulty was caused by a huge offset from the range, which shot down into the lake almost vertically. There was, it is true, a path over the top of it, a path which was usually followed by the yak caravans; but it was not practicable for camels. We pulled up for a while at the foot of the cliff, and whilst Sirkin examined the shore close down by the water's edge, Shagdur rode up to the top of the promontory. The former reported, that there was no possibility of getting

round down below; but Shagdur said, that although the path over the top had a very ugly look, we might perhaps be able to manage it. Meanwhile the yaks clambered up with wonderful agility and sureness of foot. When they reached the top, fifteen of them were unloaded, and brought back to fetch my boxes, tents and other baggage; which they took right over to the next camp on the other side. Then they returned and fetched down their own loads.

Meanwhile the axes and iron bars were at work preparing a zig-zag pathway for the camels. Although the relative altitude was not much above 650 feet, it took us a good many hours to get the beasts over, for we had to take them one by one and proceed with the utmost caution. The pass, which was crowned by a cairn of stones with little flags stuck in it, afforded a magnificent view of the whole of the Panggong-tso, backed on the south by the world of snow-clad mountains which acted as the containing wall of the basin of the Indus. But we did not linger there a moment longer than needful, for the pass was swept by a keen and murderous wind from the west. It was only possible to stand by planting our feet wide apart. Whilst jotting down my notes, I turned my back to it, and made the utmost haste, lest my fingers should turn stiff, and then hurried down in the hope of getting shelter behind some projecting rock. But in this I was disappointed: the slope faced the west and was consequently fully exposed to the tempest. It was an awful descent! Sometimes I was forced to creep on my hands and knees, and at others cling tight to the rocks to prevent myself from being blown over the precipices. Turdu Bai had gone on first, leading two of the camels; but I met him returning, he was perfectly bewildered. After a long search, we discovered a place where it would be possible to make a path, although it would take a considerable time to do it. As, however, it was already twilight, Turdu Bai and some of the other men prepared to spend the night on the mountain-side with the camels. Next morning, however, we piloted them all down successfully.

Owing to the gale, our boatmen on the other side of the lake had been unable to rejoin us; but as we saw them from time to time through our glasses, and the flare of their camp-fire was readily visible at night, we were not uneasy about them.

At Serdseh, on the border-line between Tibet and Kashmir, a great and welcome surprise awaited us in the relief caravan, which had been sent to meet us by order of the Vezir Vezarat.



Camp no. CXLVIII. Beside the Panggong-tso.

the governor of the Maharajah of Kashmir in Ladak. It had gone first to Mann, a village on the south side of the lake immediately opposite Serdseh; but hearing nothing of us there, it had turned back and tried the north side. As if by magic, our position was completely altered. There stood twelve horses and thirty yaks, entirely at our disposal, and there were sheep, flour, rice, dried fruits, milk, sugar, even corn for our animals. What more could we want? My caravan was on its very last legs, and this opportune help just saved it. Our long spell of privation and hardship was at an end. It was like a breath from

The Camp of 16th December, 1901.

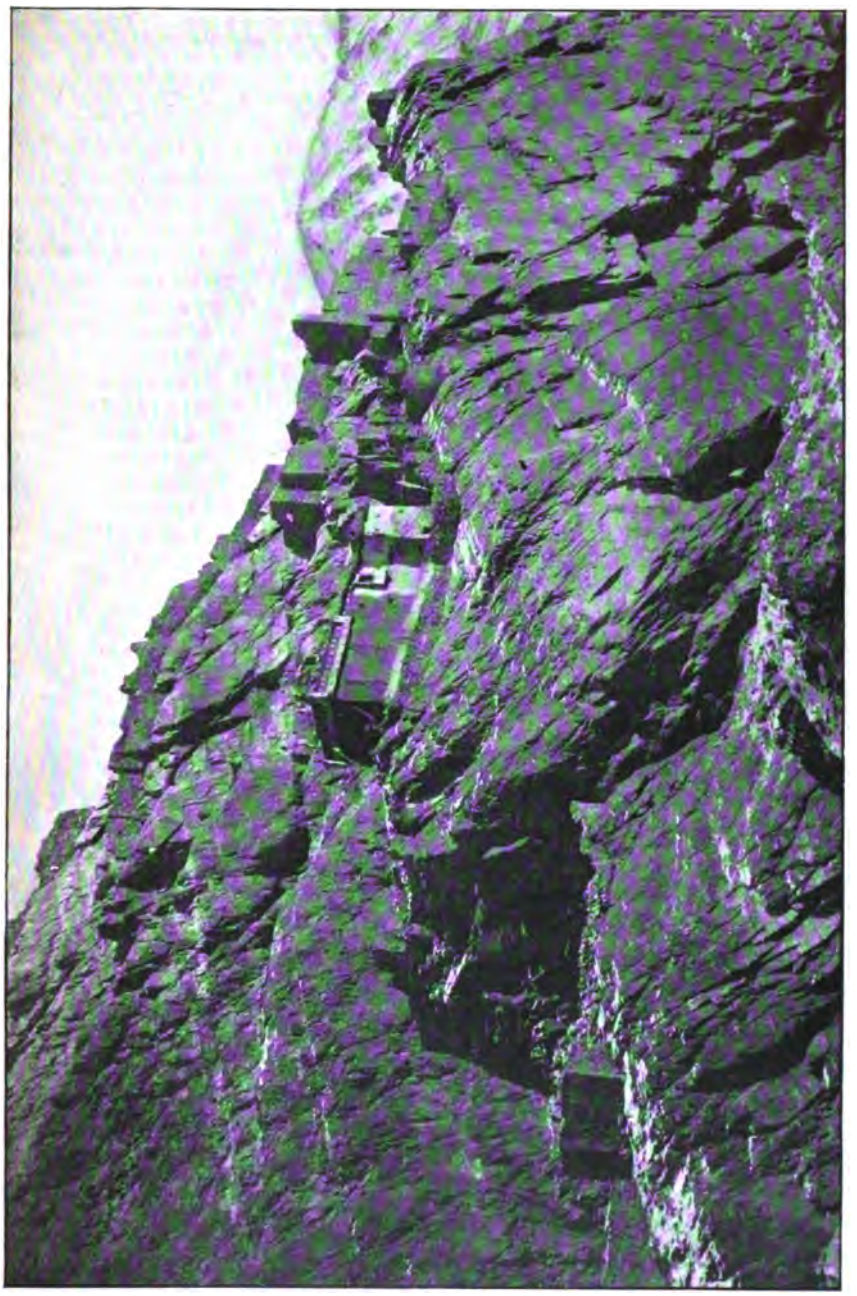
the warm plains of India, a greeting from hospitable friends, a reminder, as it were, of home!

The leaders of the caravan were two Ladakis—Anmarju, who spoke Persian fluently, so that I was able to talk to him, and Gulang Hiraman, a comical, good-natured old man, whose face beamed like the rising sun with benevolence. All the other men were also Ladakis, except one, who was a Hindu. Here I dismissed the last of the Tibetans, paying them well, and giving them all the old saucepans, cups, jugs and clothes that we no longer had any use for, as well as a revolver. It was not without a touch of melancholy that I saw them turn their backs upon us; in spite of all the toil and trouble we had caused them, they had rendered us most excellent service, and

been both friendly and honest. Thus snapped the tie which had so long bound me to Tibet. That night, when the sun set and the shades of night crept up in the east, they seemed to swallow up the land of the Dalai Lama, with all its secrets and mysteries and unsolved riddles. But in my portfolios and note-books I possessed that which softened the bitterness of the parting, namely, information calculated to shed light upon parts of Tibet which had hitherto been completely unknown.

The leaders of the relief caravan surprised me by offering me each a silver rupee. Notwithstanding the comicality of the proceeding, I understood the friendly sentiment by which the givers were animated and dropped the coins into my pocket, intending of course to pay them back with interest. We encamped side by side, close to the spring which bubbled up on the very edge of the lake, its temperature being 16°.2 C., or 61°.2 Fahr., although the temperature of the air was −6°.0 C., or 21°.2 Fahr. The water it yielded was quite warm, steamed in fact. I had a thousand questions to ask about Ladak, Kashmir and India, and it was late when we went to bed. We made a huge fire on a prominent headland as a signal to Chernoff to return; and next day he arrived safe and sound, after having measured two bathymetrical lines across the lake, and obtained a maximum depth of 155¾ feet. From this place I sent off a special courier to Leh, a journey they told us of eight days.

Before proceeding further, I must relate what happened to Yolldash, the dog which had so faithfully shared my tent and travels all the way from Osh. He spent the night as usual on the felts at my feet, and at sunrise got up, shook himself, and went out. He generally used to lie and sun himself outside the yurt until the caravan started; but that morning he ran up over the mountain on the east and—never came back. Khodai Kullu saw him tearing back along our trail as hard as he could put foot to ground. He had, as I have already mentioned, formed a close intimacy with some canine friends at a tented village amongst the lakes, and for the past two days we had kept him tied up to prevent him from running away. But he had after all given us the slip. He would have a long trot of a good thirty miles beside the Panggong-tso before he reached his inamorata. Poor Yolldash! I wonder whether he has forgotten me, and all the care and kindness I bestowed upon him during the two and a half years he was with me. I know that I, at any rate, missed



The Temple of Tanksi.

him terribly; and so did the men, though they upbraided him with ingratitude.

Whilst the caravan took another road further to the north, I, with Anmarju, Chernoff, and the Lama, proceeded beside the lake, following a giddy path over several difficult passes. When the rest of the caravan rejoined us, they had only nine camels with them. I felt sorry for the poor beast that dropped when almost within sight, as it were, of straw and corn. That night

Musicians and Dancers at Drugub; beside a Chorten.

it snowed in real earnest, and next day, the 16th December, the landscape wore a perfectly wintry aspect. From the pass above the camp we obtained a bird's-eye view of the lake; it was like a deep trench, cradled amid snowy cliffs. Although there were 18° of frost (Fahr.), and the camera was stinging cold to the touch, I nevertheless took some negatives. Turning our backs upon the grand lake of Panggong-tso, we rode across the sandy steppe which, with its sand-dunes, stretched away from its western extremity; then proceeded south-westwards up a gentle valley, until we came to a low pass or sill, marked by two stone coffers,

with large *Maneh* slabs and streamers. On the other side we went down by a deeply-scarped glen, littered with gravel and stones, and encamped on the border of a little ice-bound lake about 200 feet below the level of the Panggong-tso. We were now within the basin of the Indus; the water which trickled down that glen would eventually, after countless vicissitudes, issue in the Indian Ocean. For two-and-a-half years we had been travelling through the self-contained drainage areas of Central Asia. It was quite cheering, therefore, to know that we had at length reached a region which drained into the ocean. The little sill which I have mentioned lay 2 mm. difference of atmospheric pressure above the Panggong-tso, and had a most interesting lesson to convey when compared with the ancient beach-lines which lay 177 feet above the Panggong-tso. There was a time when this lake discharged its waters into the Indus, though now, owing to climatic changes, it is cut off from it. Hence it has turned salt, and its fresh-water mollusks have died out.

On the 17th I said good-bye to the caravan and pushed on in advance to Leh, taking with me Anmarju, Chernoff and Cherdon, and three horses to carry the baggage, and men on foot to look after them. It was pitch dark when we rose in the morning, but the active little Ladak horses were ready waiting for us with their saddles on, and off we went at a sharp trot. I wanted to reach Leh in four days, so that I might get a telegram home before Christmas Eve; but to do that, we should have to ride twenty-four miles each of the four days. As we advanced down the valley, farms and cultivated fields began to make their appearance. At Tanksi, where we changed horses, I was struck by the temple and monastery of Jova, situated very picturesquely on a detached crag. Having photographed it from below, we proceeded on to Drugub (12,858 feet), where we spent our first night. There a troop of musicians, with drums and flutes, and wearing masks, came and played and danced in the courtyard in our honour. It was most strange to be sleeping again under a roof.

Next day the road led up and up back again towards the clouds, that is to say, to the difficult pass of Chang-la. At that season of the year it was, as a rule, blocked with snow, though in the winter of 1901-2 it happened to be open, the snow lying thinly and in patches. The ascent was difficult, nothing but blank walls of bare, grey rock. It took us several hours to reach the top (17,671 feet). The descent was even more precipitous, winding

Gulang Hiraman on his Pony.

as it did zig-zag down amongst a perfect chaos of scattered granite fragments. By the time we got down to the stone huts of Taggar it was pitch dark.

How strange it was to meet fresh faces, to see villages and arable fields fenced round with stone walls, temples crowning the jutting crags, and to hear the wind whispering through the poplars and willows! All these, as we advanced, became more and more numerous. My Cossacks began to look upon me with a certain degree of wonder; they were palpably impressed by the fact of my having found my way to these strange people, of whom they had never heard before, and not less so by the

View from the Temple of Tikkseh.

friendly reception which they gave me. Down, down we went to lower regions, the air growing denser and the temperature milder. As we advanced, those wonderful Buddhist tributes to the gods, the stone kists—compared with which the obos of the Mongols are mere child's play—increased both in number and in size. One of them, which crowned a low ridge, was five feet high, ten feet across, and no less than 850 feet long, and every inch of it on both sides was covered with stone slabs, bearing in endless reiteration the sentence, "On maneh padmeh hum." What a time it must take to raise such a monument to the deities! I suppose the lamas who, with a patience surpassing Job's, sit and perpetuate this eternal apothegm in stone,

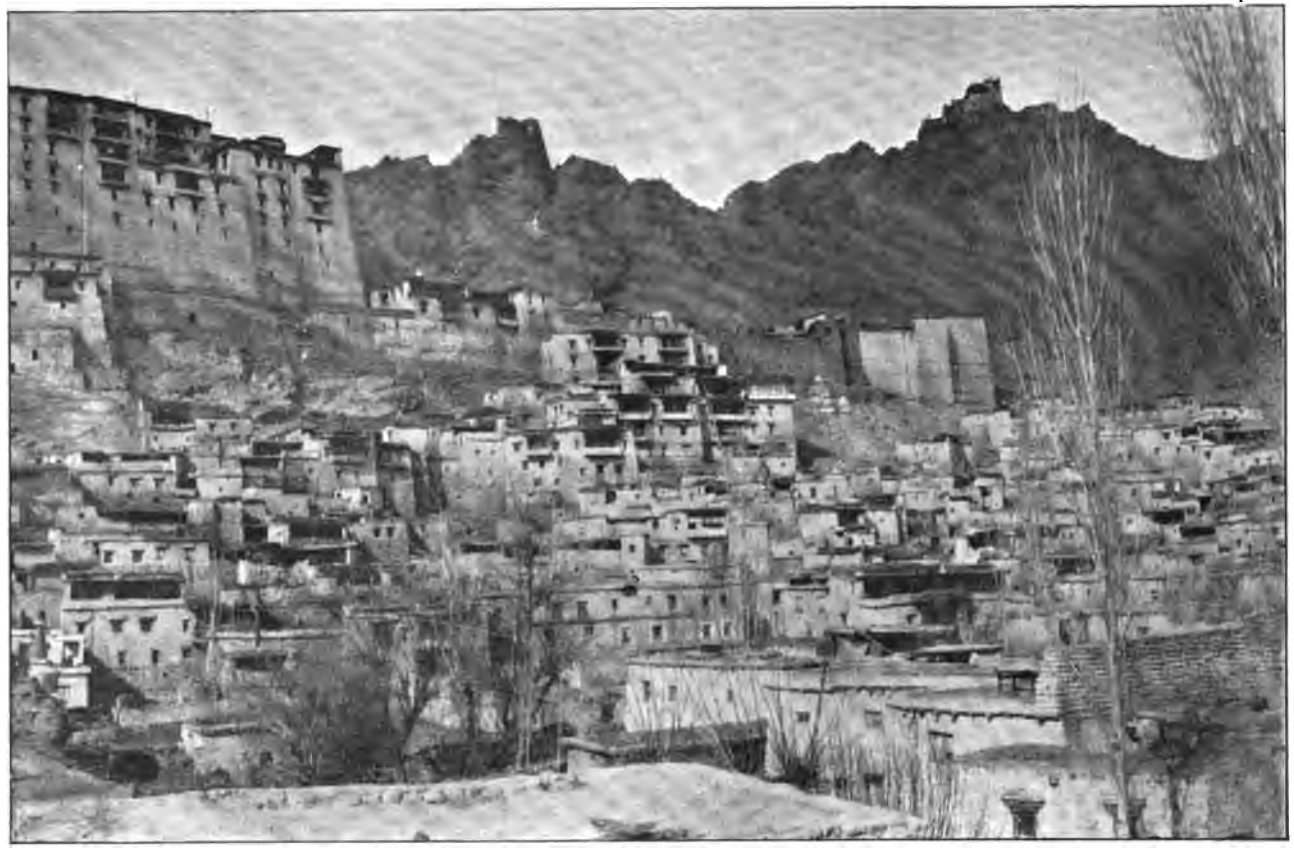
console themselves with the thought that when they are no more the very stones themselves will speak.

The temple and monastery of Jimreh occupy a marvellous situation on an outstanding crag, near a large and rich village situated below it. At length, after passing another chain of villages, we struck the Indus, winding like a serpent, with green, transparent, though broken, water at the bottom of a narrow trench, 150 to 160 feet deep. Here, at an angle above the river was a Maneh kist 10 feet high, 30 feet across, and no less than 1,365 feet, or more than a quarter of a mile, long. Deluded mortals! What a stupendous waste of labour! If these gigantic monuments of human folly were ranged end to end they would make a small Chinese wall.

Here, at this same spot, I was met by Mirza Mohammed, the *naib*, or secretary, of the Tesildar of Leh. He was a very amiable and genial man, and spoke Persian fluently, and many were the marks of kindness I was to receive from him in the immediate future. From this point we travelled at first along the right bank of the Indus, down its broad and spacious valley, until we came to the caravanserai of Tikkseh. High above the village, far from the noise of the world, lay the monastery of Tikkseh-gompa. The monks who numbered forty to fifty, kindly sent and invited me to become their guest; but I preferred to stay where I was—there was a fireplace (!) in one of the rooms of the inn. However, I paid them a visit on the following morning. Their terraces and balconies, which would have excited a painter's envy, commanded a view of the broad and spacious valley of the Indus that was overpowering in its grandeur.

Whilst on our way to Tikkseh we had been met by three messengers, one of them a woman. They carried their messages wrapped about the ends of little sticks—a sort of fiery cross. One of these people brought a telegram from the Resident of Kashmir, at that moment staying in Sialkot, running thus: "Warmest congratulations on safe arrival. Message sent to His Excellency Viceroy; trust arrangements made satisfactory."

From the moment I set foot on British territory the proofs of kindness and hospitality which were showered upon me increased from day to day. We reached Leh, the capital (4,000 inhabitants), tired and covered with dust on the 20th December. Here I was met by the Tesildar, Yettumal, a Hindu of an exceptionally distinguished presence, dressed, except for his tall white



The Town of Leh.

turban, in European garb. Speaking fluent English, he bade me welcome to the territory of the Maharajah, his master, and handed to me a polite telegram from the Vezir Vezarat. We

One of the Courtyards of the Temple of Tikkseh.

Lamas of Tikkseh. The Man on the Right is the Prior of the Temple.

rode first to the day bungalow, or hotel, where Englishmen visiting Leh generally put up. Although it was a neat, comfortable house, I preferred to accept Mirza Mohammed's, which was

formerly the church of the missionary Weber, and possessed separate rooms, where my Cossacks could bestow themselves comfortably, besides a large courtyard and abundance of room for both men and animals when my caravan should arrive. A room was soon got ready for me, with a fireplace in it, besides a carpet, bed, table and chairs; and here Yettumal handed over to me my bulging mail-bags. It was eleven months since I had heard a word from Europe, so that the feelings of eagerness and anxiety with which I looked forward to news from home may well be imagined. I broke the newest letter open first, and having satisfied myself that all were alive and well at home, I was able to go quietly through the budget in chronological order. I read on and on; I read all night, and the sun was high in the heavens before I turned in next day. I was deeply grieved to learn of Nordenskiöld's death. Yettumal, in welcoming me, had used the words "King Edward." I did not know what he meant; it was a name I had never heard. I was ignorant that Queen Victoria had been dead nearly a whole year.

The first thing I did after reaching port in Leh was to send telegrams to King Oscar of Sweden, to Lord Curzon, and to my parents, and the reply of the first-named reached me on Christmas Eve. It was couched in friendly and encouraging language: "Many thanks for telegram, and for the interesting letters sent before. I heartily rejoice in happy arrival on British territory, and hope you will soon come home. I and mine are well. Hearty greetings.—KING OSCAR." I had already written to Lord Curzon from Charkhlik, *viâ* Kashgar, asking that I might, on arriving at Leh, lift a loan of 3,000 rupees. This sum I found waiting for me. I had also said something about the possibility of a short visit to India, and I now received a long and pleasant letter from the Viceroy, concluding with these words: "I have only one thing to suggest, and that is that you come down to Calcutta, where I shall be staying from January till the end of March, and give me the pleasure of seeing you as my guest at Government House, and hearing from your own lips all that you have seen and done." After I had answered this kind invitation with an acceptance, Lord Curzon telegraphed back: "Congratulate you upon your safe arrival after most arduous journey and great discoveries. Am delighted that we shall see you here.—VICEROY."

Thus I was to pay a short visit in India, and see again Lord Curzon, whom I had met a few years before. He was present

The Last of our Camels Arriving at Leh.

at the meeting of the Royal Geographical Society in December, 1897, when I gave the lecture on my former journey. But seeing that I had before me a ride of 240 miles to Srinagar, the capital of Kashmir, I thought I might very well allow myself ten days' rest before starting, and they passed all too quickly. I was overwhelmed by the many and great kindnesses shown me by the missionaries at Leh, Messrs. Ribbach and Hettasch, and their wives, Miss Bass, and the Mission Doctor, Dr. E. Shawe, who was unremitting in his attentions to the sick men of my caravan. I visited the missionaries every day, and have seldom known a station conducted in so exceptional a manner and with such promise of success. We spent Christmas Eve together in the cosy little room attached to the church. The apartment was one blaze of light, and the Christmas tree, hung all over with little wax candles, reminded me of many a happy day of my childhood. The little church was full to overflowing, and Mr. Ribbach preached in Ladaki, and the audience, dressed in their best, listened reverently and joined in the Psalms. Although I did not understand a word of what the preacher said, I have seldom been present at a more solemn and affecting service. My senses were hypnotised by the cheerful glitter of the lights, and my heart deeply stirred by the sweet and soothing tones of the organ. I had such an immense deal to be thankful for, now that my labours were at an end, and I was once more amongst Europeans.

The caravan arrived on Christmas Day. The last nine camels which had successfully climbed over the pass of Chang-la were now at liberty to rest. The noise in the streets made them rather shy, but they were soon at home in the peaceful courtyard, and I had the pleasure of seeing their eyes light up when they caught the scent of the luscious clover, which I had had brought in for them. The inhabitants of the little town, who had scarcely ever seen camels before, climbed to the top of the walls that surrounded the courtyard, and gazed with the utmost amazement at the strange, long-necked, hump-backed animals.

My plans for the immediate future were soon formed. Whilst I ran down into India, the caravan would stay at Leh and rest. I did not, however, require more than three of the Mussulmans, so that it just fitted, when the rest of them came and asked that they might return home *viâ* Kara-korum and Yarkand. I paid them their wages, with substantial additions, as well as a present of clothes, provisions, and horses to ride on; and hired a

karakesh, or horse-owner, a native of Yarkand, who undertook for a certain sum to guide them to his native town. Then Sirkin, who was longing to get home to his wife and children, came and asked whether he might accompany them. This also suited me very well, because it gave me an opportunity to send letters to Consul-General Petrovsky at Kashgar. Accordingly, the following men here left me—Mollah Shah, Hamra Kul, Turdu Ahun, Rosi Mollah, Li Loyeh, Almaz, Islam, Ahmed, and Ördek, the last named being told off to act as servant to Sirkin. With their train of baggage horses, their guide, and his two servants, they made quite an imposing caravan, as, on the 29th December, 1901, they rode out of Leh. In spite of his longing to get home, Sirkin shed tears when I gave him my hand in farewell, and thanked him for the very great services he had rendered me.

I left Chernoff behind in charge of my caravan at Leh, Cherdon remaining with him as meteorologist, while Turdu Bai, Kutchuk and Khodai Kullu, the best of the Mussulmans, were retained to look after the camels, the mules, and my old riding-horse respectively. I gave them plenty of money to "keep house with," and Yettumal promised to see that they wanted for nothing. Dr. Shawe and the other missionaries also promised to look after them during my absence. Mr. Ribbach took the greatest interest in our Lama, who also stayed behind, and the two were very soon on a confidential footing. Shagdur I took with me to India having first obtained the Viceroy's consent to do so.

XII.

To India, Kashgar and Home.

CHAPTER XXXV.

A VISIT TO INDIA.

HERE I ought perhaps to conclude my narrative, seeing that I have reached parts which are well known, and have been described, and well described, by travellers of world-wide reputation. Still, for reasons which I need not specially emphasise, I cannot conclude without giving some account of what was one of the pleasantest episodes, if not indeed the very pleasantest episode, of the whole journey.

On the morning of the 1st January, 1902, four active little Ladaki horses stood impatiently pawing the ground outside my quarters. I and Shagdur rode two of them; the other two carried our luggage, and were driven by men on foot. Yettumal ordered his secretary, Mirza Mohammed, to accompany me. How uncertain is life! and yet how much more inscrutable is death! It was destined that I should not have an opportunity to thank the Tesildar, Yettumal, for the many kind services which he rendered me, for when I returned to Leh, he was dead and cremated, and his ashes scattered on the sacred waters of the Ganges.

To Srinagar, the capital and summer residence of the Maharajah of Kashmir, was a journey of over 240 miles. Horses were changed at every station or bungalow (*pangla*), sometimes oftener, so that we could travel as fast as ever we liked. But I was too tired to rush it, and seldom did more than one stage in the day; hence it took us 11 days to reach Srinagar. The first stage was to Niemo, where we found a very comfortable caravanserai, with an airy *bala-khaneh*, or upper storey, which reminded me of my travels in Persia. After that we descended among the cultivated fields and orchards of Saspul, the latter full of apple and apricot trees. Beyond that point the road ran along the right bank of the Indus, which was walled in by tremendous precipices, 1,500 feet high at least. The views which successively unfolded themselves were sublime. The masterly way in which

the river had carved a path through the mountains appealed especially to my artistic instincts. The water was clear, and of a dark green colour; and as we rode for the most part some 150 feet above it, the river was spread out before us like a map. Sometimes it flowed in tranquil silence; it was then deep and broad. Sometimes its channel was contracted; then it boiled headlong down the cataracts, and hurried with a thundering roar amongst the stones which littered its bed. Sometimes it was frozen over, the ice being used as a bridge by the natives. The left side of the valley was continually in the shade, owing to the lofty precipices by which it was shut in. But at the entrance of the valley of Hippti there was a gap, through which the sun poured like a cascade, causing the light green water of the Indus to glisten like an emerald. The effects due to the brilliant sunshine followed one another with amazing rapidity. Up and down the path wound capriciously along the mountain-side, mostly at a giddy height; and sometimes it was so narrow that two people could not pass each other without great peril. Whenever we approached a sharp angle, our coolies ran forward and uttered a loud, shrill cry of warning, to keep the road clear.

Upon reaching Kalachi we turned up a little side-glen, leaving the valley of the Indus on our left hand. The path was often dangerous. Sometimes it clung to one side of the glen, sometimes to the other, crossing the river at the bottmo on little tottering wooden bridges. One of these looked so unsafe that we preferred to cross on the ice beside it. Just beyond the bridge of Sampa-nezrak a spring gushed out of the rock, and its water, freezing as it emerged, had covered the path with a little mound of ice. Here one of the baggage horses slipped and fell, and would have rolled down the precipice had I not caught hold of his tail just as he was hovering, and held him fast until the men ran to my assistance. A little further on we came to the Lamaist monastery of Lamayuruz, built in a peculiar and picturesque position on the summit of a razor-backed cliff of gravel-and-shingle, cleft by deep ravines. It is merely a question of time; but some day it will plunge into the depths below. At the bottom of the gorge there were an immense number of *chortens* ("stone pyramids"; see ill., p. 581), as is generally the case near the temples in this part of India.

On the 4th of January we crossed over the two passes of Fotu-la (13,450 feet) and Namika-la (13,010 feet), and when we reached the village and bungalow of Mulbekh it was pitch dark.

There we had an extraordinary reception, being met by a train of torch-bearers, whose torches shot up showers of sparks through the apricot trees, tingeing their branches a fiery red. At Kargil, where we were met by another nice, pleasant Tesildar, I was greatly astonished at being received by forty young girls dressed in holiday attire. Each of them carried a dish with something to eat upon it, it being the custom of the country for the guest to touch each dish, and, if so disposed, to slip a few annas under the food.

I had been told before leaving Leh that the pass of Zoji-la is nearly always closed in winter, and that I might there be

An Old Ladaki.

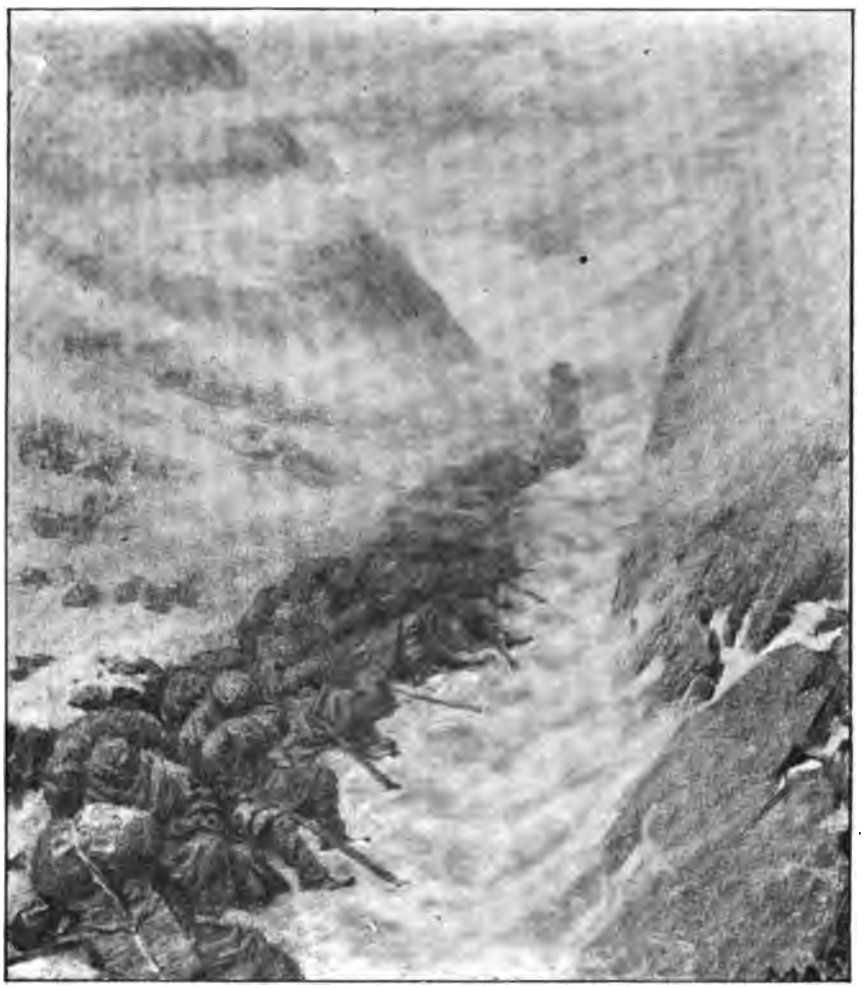
turned back; but this winter the snowfall happened to be a good deal less than usual, and upon inquiry by telegram we learnt that the pass was not at all dangerous. At Kargil we picked up a first-rate pass-climber and headman of coolies in Abdullah, a native of Ladak, who spoke Turki, or Yarkandi, as they called it there; and in the village of Draz we hired 50 coolies, with their spades and pickaxes, to go on first and mend the path where it was rendered slippery by the ice. There was a station at Matchui, quite close to the pass—a perfect God-send it must be for travellers who have the ill-luck to get snowed up, as happened a few years ago, and before the house was built, to the former Vezir

Vezarat of Ladak. He had made himself hated by his extortions, and the people on both sides of the pass were only too delighted at the opportunity to keep him shut up out of harm's way for two whole months, during which time he nearly perished of hunger, for he had a large retinue of coolies with him.

On the 9th of January we crossed over the Zoji-la, the worst pass I have ever seen, although its altitude did not exceed 11,500 feet, that is, more than 6,000 feet lower than the Tibetan passes we had lately had to deal with. Upon reaching Matchui, we left our horses and crossed the snow on foot, which crunched loudly

On the Way up the Zoji-la.

under our feet, for the thermometer was down to – 22°.0 C., or – 7°.6 Fahr. The Ladakis tied soft snow-shoes under our feet to prevent us from slipping, and we scrambled after them to the summit of the pass, which was so flat as to be scarcely perceptible. Shortly after that, however, we went down by a break-neck descent to the station-house of Baltal; the path zigzagged backwards and forwards down the face of an almost perfect precipice. We had to keep a very sharp look-out, and he careful not to lose our heads—a slip would have been fatal. The snow had melted where the sun touched it, making the ice-clad pathway exceedingly dangerous, even after the coolies hewed out steps with their ice-axes. Zoji-la is an important line of division, both orographically and climatically, between Tibet



My Coolies Resting During a Snowstorm on the Pass of Zoji-la.

and Kashmir. When you stand on the summit of the pass you have the glen of Baltal at your feet, and to me it was an especial pleasure to hear again the mysterious murmur of the dark pine-woods—it put me so much in mind of my Northern home.

I shall not attempt to describe the beautiful country we rode through during the last two days—the dark green woods, the quaint towns, foaming rivers with their picturesque bridges,

A Dancing-Girl of Kargil.

in the background the glittering snowy mountains—the whole canopied by a turquoise-blue sky. The glowing descriptions which I have read of the lovely valleys of Kashmir really paled beside the reality.

At Srinagar I was received with genuine English hospitality by Captain E. Le Mesurier and his amiable wife, and in their society I spent two or three days I shall not soon forget. On the 14th of January we started again. Srinagar lies 5,250 feet above the level of the sea, and thence we were to descend, by a couple of secondary passes, to lower altitudes, until we finally reached

the hot plains of India. The road ran first through the valley of the Jehlam, across the pass of Murree (Murri), and so on down to Rawal pindi. The road is a masterpiece of engineering, and in point of natural beauty far surpasses the Gruzinian (Georgian) military road across the Caucasus. To race down its thousand zigzags was a refinement of travel—indeed, I am almost tempted to call it a forbidden delight. The *tonga*, or travelling-cart, rested upon two moderate-sized wheels, and was provided with a roof and awnings at the side. It had two seats, with a back common to both. I and the driver sat on the front seat, and Shagdur on the back seat with the luggage. At the end of the strong, slightly turned-up pole there was a cross-bar, which was fastened by straps to the horses' saddle-pads, an arrangement which allows you to change horses in two or three minutes. It seldom took us more than half-an-hour from station to station. A few minutes before we reached the station, our driver used to blow a short, but tuneful, fanfare on his horn, and when we pulled up there stood a fresh pair of horses ready waiting for us. The pole was lifted from the panting, steaming pair we had just driven behind, the new ones were backed into their places, the straps were buckled, and away we went again at a gallop. As a rule the driver had far harder work to hold in his horses than to urge them on, so that I was not always quite sure whether they had bolted or not. So long as we were in the open country between Srinagar and Baramula there was no danger, but when we entered the gorge by which the road wound down the slopes of the Jehlam valley, there were plenty of places to make a man feel giddy, if that way inclined. The road went down steeply, and the horses literally tore along. On the right was a precipice, dropping sheer into the river, which churned and foamed at its foot, the only protection being a barrier two feet high. On ahead the road seemed all at once to come to an abrupt end ; but no, it swung sharply to the left. Yet on went our driver, without tightening rein. I thought the man was mad. We should go headlong over the precipice. Even though the horses managed to clear the corner, the cart must, it seemed, certainly pitch over and fling us out like a trio of loose apples. Just as I thought we were going to take a headlong spin through empty space, the horses slackened speed. But the corner was taken so finely that I was amazed we got round it alive. At this and similar corners the clear notes of the hunting-horn always rang out musically and distinctly

as a warning to any other tonga that might be racing towards the same corner from any other direction.

Upon approaching Murree, the glory of the drive was increased tenfold, for we passed into the thick shade of a magnificent forest of Coniferæ. We now began to get down to lower levels; the air grew heavier, the breezes, which played amongst the hills at sunset, were softer and more balmy. But never for one moment did we slacken in our headlong race. It was already dark when our tonga began to rattle through the long straight streets of Rawalpindi. We drove direct to the railway station, for it was only an hour before our train started. After being so long accustomed to the silence of the desert and the stillness of the mountain wastes, it was to us a very strange thing to hear the shrill whistle of the railway engine.

At Lahore I stopped three days, incognito, of course, for I did not possess a single stitch of clothing that I could wear in good society. I rigged myself out afresh from top to toe, and, although somewhat weather-worn and sunburnt, was in a trice converted into a faultlessly-groomed gentleman. After that there was no longer any need of an incognito. The last evening I dined with Sir W. Macworth Young, the Lieutenant-Governor of the Punjab, and felt as if I had never been anything else but a society lion all my life.

What shall I say about Lahore—about Delhi, Agra, Lucknow, Benares? I will say nothing. All that I must leave to people who have time to study those marvellous and mystic cities; volumes might be written about each of them. I was merely a bird of passage, and only stopped one or two days at each. Although flying like a wild goose past the Taj Mahal, I could not, even in passing, withhold my admiration of the burial-mosque of Shah Jahan. It was unquestionably the loveliest work of art I have ever seen. The boasted glories of Constantinople, of Isfahan, Mashhad, Samarkand—all pale beside it. It is a summer dream in white marble, a piece of purest sky converted into stone. And Benares? Never shall I forget the boating-trips I made alongside its quays and stairways, those broad steps where every morning at sunrise thousands of pilgrims go to bathe in the hope of recovering health and strength. And then the Brahmins who worship the river, and recite over it their complicated prayers, and the aged people of the land who journey thither to die beside the sacred Ganges! In the midst of these bathing pilgrims and happy, playing children, I

saw them washing a corpse in the river, ready for burning on the funeral pyre, to the strains of their own peculiar music. There is nothing to equal a row on the Ganges by moonlight. As I lay back dreaming in the stillness of the night, my imagination was excited by the holy city and by the thousand and one stories of its hoary, legendary past.

At Lucknow I was awakened one morning by Lieutenant Didrik Bildt, the only Swede I met in the course of my visit to India. And a thorough Swede he was, too ; I was proud to call him my countryman. In his charming company I spent one never-to-be-forgotten day in Lucknow, visiting with him all the sights and objects of interest.

Shagdur's growing amazement at all he saw and heard was to me a source of great enjoyment. It was, of course, only natural that a simple Buriat Cossack from Siberia should be impressed by all he saw and heard amongst these ancient cities of the Great Mogul, with their palm-trees, and pagodas, and bazaars crowded with noisy multitudes, showing in their dress every shade of colour under heaven. He asked me all sorts of questions about everything he saw, repeated to me his observations and speculations, and was unable to find words to express the fulness of his amazement. When we met a train of elephants in Lucknow, he could scarce believe his own eyes, and asked whether these colossal things really were living animals, and not some sort of machine, constructed in a different way from railway engines. To convince him that they really were alive, I asked the keeper to stop one of his animals, and then, stepping into an adjacent bazaar, bought a bunch of sugar-cane, and went and fed the elephant. The way the beast examined thoroughly every piece tendered to him, and cleverly rejected what was not good to eat, soon convinced Shagdur that the elephant was a real live animal.

Upon reaching Calcutta early on the morning of the 25th of January, I was met at the station by a Viceregal carriage, with four servants, wearing scarlet and gold liveries and lofty white turbans. Another vehicle took charge of Shagdur and the luggage. We drove direct to Government House, where I was conducted to a room on the second floor. I have never lived amid such grand surroundings as in the Viceregal Palace of India. The reception-rooms were adorned with costly works of art, the floors covered with soft Indian carpets, the walls hidden behind large oil portraits of the kings and queens of Great Britain, of Indian Maharajahs and Persian Shahs, all

bathed in the brilliancy of the electric light. My bedroom, a vast apartment, had a private balcony, kept cool by an immense awning, from which I was able to drink in the fragrance of the palm-trees in the park. It also commanded a magnificent view of Calcutta, and beyond, right away to the jungles in the delta of the Hugli. The heat was distinctly perceptible in Bengal. End of January though it was, to a "Tibetan" like me it was even oppressive, so that I was beyond measure delighted to have a bath-room all to myself, and I made good use of it several times a day.

I arrived on a Sunday, and an adjutant at once came to tell me that his Excellency the Viceroy was expecting me at the Palace of Barrakpur, two hours by steamboat up the river. Accordingly, after breakfast I was taken there, in bright summer weather, with

Huts Below Baltal.

a crisp breeze, on the steam launch *Maude*, with the pleasantest company that could be wished—Colonel Fenn, body physician to His Excellency the Viceroy, and Mrs. Fenn; Colonel Robertson, British Resident in Mysore; and Mr. C. S. Bayley, Resident in Indore, Central India.

Barrakpur, which was furnished with that elegance and distinction of taste which are so characteristic of the English, stood in the midst of a tropical park. We were received by Lord and Lady Curzon and their two fascinating little daughters, in a large, cool, shady arbour. Lord Curzon welcomed me with the cordiality of an old friend, and presented me to the charming lady who shares his dignities. At lunch he proposed my health, and congratulated me upon the success of my journey. After I and my host had spent two or three hours discussing geographical questions, I was taken for a drive in the neighbourhood by

Lady Curzon, who handled the ribbons with as much skill as grace.

The ten days that I had the honour to be Lord and Lady Curzon's guest will always count amongst the brightest and happiest of my life. Not only did I receive every day fresh and embarrassing proofs of kindness and hospitality, but Lord Curzon, one of the most distinguished students of the geography of Asia, entered with the liveliest and most appreciative interest into the various incidents of my journey, the scope and significance of which he fully realised.

We in Europe have very little conception of what it means to be Governor-General of India, with almost absolute power over 300,000,000 subjects, or very nearly as many as are ruled by all the Sovereigns of Europe together. It is an august—an incomparable position, and compels admiration of a kingdom which is able to offer such a unique honour to one of its sons. Lord Curzon realises fully the responsibility which rests upon him, and takes an earnest view of his duties, sacrificing all his time and all his strength to the functions of his office. The whole of his time, except an hour or so for meals, was spent at his study-table. He had not a moment to spare for sport or social pleasures. Once when he accompanied us to the theatre he slipped away before the close of the first act, and hurried back to resume the cares of office. Lord Curzon's study was a large and tastefully furnished room, full of books and despatches, arranged on different tables and bookshelves. Here he did me the great honour of inspecting the scores of map-sheets which I had brought with me from Ladak, and I am not likely to forget the exceedingly kind, and even flattering, observations that he made upon them.

During my stay at Government House, two or three state dinners and state balls were given, with a splendour and magnificence which would not suffer by comparison with similar events at any of the great Courts of Europe. One day a German and an Austrian warship came steaming up the Hugli. This led to a breakfast to the officers at Government House, and was followed by several hospitable gatherings on board both ships and at the German Club. Mr. Voigt, Swedish-Norwegian Consul-General at Calcutta, gave a successful and enjoyable dinner in my honour.

During my nine years' wanderings in many parts of Asia my experiences have been many and of divers characters and complexions, but I do not ever remember such a great contrast

between those I was now experiencing and the months that immediately preceded them. For two and a half years I had been cut off from the world, isolated amid the deserts and mountains of Central Asia, enduring exposure and fatigue, hardships and privations of every kind, and here I was, lapped in the luxury and refinement of a consummate civilization. For years I had led a solitary existence; now I made new acquaintances at every step. A little while before I was working and travelling in 50°-60° (Fahr.) of frost, and climbing mountain-ranges 16,000—17,000 feet above the level of the sea, the only denizens of which were the arkhari and the wild yak; now I was strolling under the palm trees on the shores of the Indian Ocean, amid the fabled splendours of the tropics. Only a little while ago, and I was living in the filthy smoky tents amongst the Tibetans; now I was enjoying all the refinements and delicate graces of English home life, intoxicated by the scent of roses, entrancing music, and the conversation of beautiful ladies. The Tibetans had treated me as a suspicious and dangerous individual; here in India I was literally overwhelmed with hospitality and kindness. When a new engagement beckoned me, I literally had to drag myself away from the kind friends with whom I happened at the moment to be staying. In fact, I was everywhere made perfectly and thoroughly at home. These successive departures and leave-takings imparted the only tinge of sadness to what was otherwise in every respect a most delightful and memorable trip.

During the last few days of my stay at Government House there were two distinguished visitors, namely, Sir Ernest Cassel and Professor Oscar Browning, of Cambridge, with whom I had several bright and happy talks.

The Indian press had welcomed me with such flattering marks of attention that I was inundated with invitations—to Darjiling, Ceylon, Mysore, Peshawar, from Major Younghusband, my old friend of Kashgar (1890), the Swedish missionaries, and many others. But I did not forget my caravan and my Cossacks, waiting patiently in Leh. Still there were some invitations which I could not resist, although by this means my stay in India was somewhat prolonged. Unfortunately, my faithful Cossack, Shagdur, contracted a fever, and was very weak the whole of our stay in Calcutta. He was very comfortably installed in a tent with a boarden floor, bathroom, and electric light, in the park, and was attended by Colonel Fenn and his

assistant, Emir Baksh, who had accompanied Mr. Forsyth on his mission to Yakub Beg, of Kashgar, in 1873. I left Shagdur in their care, whilst I made a trip further south, arranging to meet him at Rawalpindi on my return.

After saying good-bye to Lord and Lady Curzon, I left Calcutta on the 5th of February, and travelled to Secundarabad, near Hyderabad (Haidarabad), to see my chivalrous friend of the Pamir Boundary Commission of 1895, Colonel McSwiney. He was stationed at the military camp of Bolarum in the Nizam's territory, where there was an English force of over 8,000 men. I spent three right happy days with Colonel McSwiney, who entertained me with military parades and picturesque displays of cavalry, amongst which tent-pegging by torchlight and in the glare of huge fires particularly interested me.

At Bombay I was the guest of the governor, Lord Northcote, and his charming wife. With them also I spent four days which I shall not readily forget. My apartment, which was again provided with a balcony, was at the very extremity of Malabar Point, and thus I had the ocean all round me, except on the north, where a narrow tongue of land led to the Parsees' "Tower of Silence." It was like living on board ship, a marvellous change for one who had been so many months in the interior of Asia. I never grew tired of listening to the cadence of the waves, as they beat against the foot of the cliff. Oh, how I longed to return home on their buoyant swell! It would have been infinitely preferable to climbing back up to the dreary, inhospitable mountains of western Tibet, and travelling all that long way across the two continents. I confess it cost me an effort to put the temptation from me; but I could not desert my caravan, and abandon wantonly the results of my journey. So, after a visit to the caves of Elephanta, with our Swedish-Norwegian Consul, Mr. Bickel, and a dinner at the house of the German Consul, Count Pfeil, and another with the French Consul, M. Vossion, I took leave of Lord and Lady Northcote, and returned to Delhi. I was exceedingly sorry to miss the learned Russian Consul, M. V. Klemm, who, eleven years before, had shown me such great kindness at Bokhara. He had just gone away on a short leave of absence, and although he was to be back in two or three days, I was unable to await his return. I was the more sorry because I owe him especial thanks for the generous offer he made me with regard to Shagdur. He proposed that if my young Cossack, who evidently could not stand the climate

of India, was not strong enough to go back with me to Leh, he would send him on the first opportunity, and at the expense of the Consulate, to Colombo, and thence to Vladivostok, from which port he could easily reach his own home.

On my way to Rawalpindi I only stopped once or twice. At Jaipur I was met by the Maharajah's carriage, and had a splendid trip on one of his magnificently caparisoned elephants to the ruins of Amber. At Jaipur all the houses were rose-coloured, and all the inhabitants dressed in pinks and reds. It was like the blush of the morning in a garden of roses. There I was shown the greatest hospitality by Mr. Cobb, the British Resident.

The Maharajah of Kapurtala invited me by telegraph to visit him at his palace at Kartarpur, and there I spent two extremely pleasurable days in making excursions by carriage, by boat, and by elephant, accompanied in each case by His Highness himself. One of the days happened to be my birthday, and in honour of the occasion His Highness had a band of music, champagne, and other nice things at the dinner. My stay in Kartarpur was like actually living a piece of the Thousand and One Nights.

At Rawalpindi I picked up poor Shagdur, who, in consequence of his illness, did not derive half the pleasure from his visit in India that I had intended him to have. Colonel Fenn had sent him on from Calcutta in charge of a native assistant, and at Rawalpindi he had been again kindly taken in hand by Captain Waller and Major Medley, the well-known Asiatic traveller. The latter spent a good many hours talking Russian with Shagdur, so that Shagdur was perfectly delighted with him. Major Marshall, of the Army Medical Corps, who attended him, advised me to get him up into the mountains as soon as possible. But he was still so weak he could not sit up in the tonga, so that I could do nothing but wait patiently. As for myself, I was in clover. All the officers, from General Sir Bindon Blood, who had just returned from South Africa, downwards vied with one another in showing me attentions. Unfortunately I missed Dr. M. A. Stein, whose headquarters were at Rawalpindi. He had recently returned from his important and successful journey in East Turkestan. But happily I was able to make his acquaintance by correspondence, and before the year 1902 came to an end I had the pleasure of meeting him in London.

At length Shagdur was sufficiently well for us to make a start. We drove up to Srinagar by the same road and in the

same way that we had driven down two months before. At the station-house of Ghari I met Sir Robert and Lady Harvey, and spent a most delightful afternoon in their company.

Thanks to the exceeding kindness of Captain and Mrs. Le Mesurier, Shagdur had another rest of five days at Srinagar, during which he picked up immensely in the fresh cool air of Kashmir. This gentleman and his wife were the first and the last English people I met during my long trip into India, so that the first impression which I received of the ruling race in that great dependency was both cordial and sympathetic, and it was with real and deep regret that I said good-bye to them—they were so unspeakably kind and nice, both to me and to my Cossack. The Captain, who was Joint Commissioner for Ladak, sent a telegram to Leh, ordering everything to be in readiness against our arrival, and especially that measures of precaution should be taken at Zoji-la. Mrs. Le Mesurier was in every respect an accomplished lady, and she had besides made a thorough study of the geography of Kashmir, and of the manners and customs of its inhabitants.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

HOME VIÂ THE MONASTERY OF HIMIS.

ON the 6th of March we started again for Leh. I engaged two palankins called "dandies," each with eight bearers, and used mine as far as I possibly could; but Shagdur had such a decided objection to that method of travel that, weak as he was, he preferred to ride.

At Sonamarg I received telegrams from Capt. Le Mesurier, the Vezir Vezarat, as well as from Kargil and Leh, warning me on no account to attempt the pass of Zoji-la. The first-named very kindly invited me to return to Srinagar. But be the risk what it might, go on I must. The pass is more difficult from the Indian side, for you have to climb on foot *up* the ugly precipices. This time, too, we were unable to use the summer road, as we did when we came down, but were obliged to take the deep ravine into which the avalanches crash down every winter from the overhanging cliffs, and kill so many people. The utmost caution is at all times necessary. It is best to travel early in the morning, whilst the snow is still frozen; it is in the afternoon that the avalanches fall, after the snow gets softened by the sun. Nobody ever attempts to force the pass in snowy weather, for it is then that the peril is greatest.

On the 10th of March we were up at daybreak; it was still pitch dark, raw, and bitterly cold, and the stars still glittered brightly in the frigid steel-blue sky. The mountains and the snows were only just faintly perceptible. We were soon ready. First went 63 coolies and men to help smooth the road, walking in Indian file (see illustration, p. 600); after them followed several horses, carrying the men's provisions, and, last of all, we ourselves on horseback, escorted by the Naib-i-tesildar of Ganderbal and his suite. As it grew slowly lighter, the white snow-fields became more and more distinctly perceptible, and the spruces stood out blacker and blacker against them. Every now and again somebody would tumble head over heels in the

snow, which gradually grew deeper. On we went, climbing up and up, step by step. The crust of the snow was still firm enough to bear men on foot; but it soon turned soft and let us through. When the horses no longer felt firm ground under their feet, but floundered about like porpoises, we all got off and walked. At Baltal we were met by Abdullah and twenty-three experienced and trusty mountaineers.

The next day we traversed the dangerous gorge. It was no longer recognisable, the masses of rock with which it was choked

A Young Woman of Ladak.

being buried under fallen avalanches to a depth, it was said, of 500 feet. In winter, therefore, the road runs over the top of this stupendous accumulation of snow, while in summer the gorge is absolutely impracticable. I and Shagdur were hauled and pushed to the top of the pass, down which swept a keen, cutting wind, like a waterfall, whirling up the snow in blinding clouds. But once happily past the most dangerous spots, all peril was over. Although the snow still lay deep, it was no longer drifted as it was in the pass. After every fresh fall the people trample a path, until eventually the track consists of a mere succession of deep holes. If you can manage it without losing

your balance, it is best to walk on the little ridges between the holes, but as a rule people keep to the holes themselves.

In this way we struggled for four days across the pass and its approaches, until we were able to use yaks, and subsequently horses. For three days and three nights we were snowed up at Kargil, and the people endeavoured to amuse us with dancing girls and boisterous music. We reached Leh on the 25th March, and found all well. All the men whom I had dismissed had returned, except Sirkin and Ördek, saying that the pass was blocked with snow. Sirkin and Ördek had, however, succeeded

The Entrance Door of the Temple of the Doggtsang Raspa.

in forcing their way through, and they eventually reached Kashgar in safety.

It was my intention to rest at Leh for two or three days only, and then hasten northwards over the pass of Kara-korum; but the fates were against me. Shagdur had a violent and serious relapse, and Doctor Shawe diagnosed it as typhoid fever. There would be no possibility of his being able to travel under any circumstances for two or three months. He was fearfully weak and emaciated, and for two nights was delirious. Thus we were detained day after day. I fully realized that I should have to leave him, but I would not do it till the poor fellow was pro-

nounced out of danger; and there were two days during which we had almost given up hope. But about the middle of April he got the turn, the crisis was passed, and he only needed a couple of months' rest and nursing in the mission hospital, where Doctor Shawe would have him under his own eye. I did all I possibly could for the invalid's comfort. I gave orders to Li Loyeh to stay with him, and be his servant, promising that if he did his duty well, he should have an extra reward when he reached Kashgar. They were to stay at Leh till the summer, and accompany a merchant's caravan to Yarkand, and thence

The Prior of Himis.

continue to Kashgar. I gave Shagdur two hundred rupees for his support, and if he should need more, Consul Klemm undertook to advance it.

It was hard to part from him. When I went into his room for the last time, on the 5th of April, it was full of warm and pleasant sunshine. Shagdur was of course sorry he was not able to accompany us to the end of the journey; but he saw that he must rest quiet until he was thoroughly well. I tried to look at things from the bright side, and comforted him with the promise that, as far as it depended upon me, I would take him with me on my next journey. This cheered him up; he said it would be the greatest happiness and honour that life

could give him. At length I wrung his hand and tore myself away, committing him to God's care. Then the dam burst; he turned his head away to hide the tears. I hurried out, so as not to let him see the moisture that was glittering in my own eyes. And, of a truth, I did feel it intensely—the long uncertain separation. I was also really very sorry to leave the Ribbachs, the Hettaschs, and Doctor Shawe. They had shown me such exceptional kindness and rendered me such ungrudging help. The memory I carried away with me of their mission-

The Temple Court-yard at Himis.

station was that of an ideal establishment of its kind. Nor was it an easy thing to say farewell to our old and faithful veterans, the nine camels which survived, the only ones which had got through to Leh. During the three months they had already rested from their hardships they had grown fat and plump, and now ate their food with the utmost relish. But it was impossible to take them over the Kara-korum in winter. I sold them, therefore, for a mere song to a merchant from Yarkand, who was returning home in the following summer.

Great though the contrast was to go down from the Tibetan plateau, with its 16,000–17,000 feet of altitude and its rigorous

winter, to the hot summer of India at the sea-level, the transition which now took place in the opposite direction was not less abrupt. It was really surprising, that I kept free from every trace of fever; but to counterbalance the immunity on that score, I was exceedingly tired, and was longing intensely to get back to my peaceful study in Stockholm. I decided, therefore, to travel as far as I possibly could in a palankin, that is to say, as far as the foot of the pass of Chang-la. Borne by four stout

A Lama Attired for a Religious Festival.

fellows I swung away out of Leh, and, dipping below the hills, we soon left behind us the picturesque little town, with the palace of its former kings crowning the crag that overhangs it. As the men sped down towards the Indus at a swift pace, they sang a characteristic antiphonic measure; that is to say, the leader sang a short strophe, whereupon the others joined in with a monotonous sleepy refrain. But the song stimulated them and helped them to march in time. On the 6th April we advanced down the left bank of the Indus; that is to say, I and my two attendants, the Lama and Kutchuk. The caravan,

The Idol of the Doggtsang Raspa.

with the hired horses, kept to the main road over the Chang-la, and then followed the right bank of the stream. At length we turned away from the Indus, and travelled south and south-west up the gravelly scree of the southern mountain-range, and then entered the valley of Himis, passing on the way a number of picturesque *chortens* (p. 581), as well as several rows of round or oblong stone kists. As we advanced, the valley grew narrower, and turned almost due west; the grey rocks

A Lama Wearing a Mask.

being dotted with solitary groups of poplars and the mountains wreathed with snow. Soon the famous temple of Himis came into sight. It resembled a cluster of houses arranged like an amphitheatre, or, rather, plastered like swallows' nests against the face of the precipice. After scrambling up winding paths, and threading various gangways and courtyards, protected by breastworks, we at length reached a little door in the wall, and met with a friendly reception from the prior. He was a little old man, with a thin grey beard and a big ugly nose, but his smile was the perfection of kindliness and good nature. His name was Ngavang Chö Tsang, and his title, Himi Chaggtsot.

I never in all my life saw such a labyrinth of rooms and cells, courtyards and passages, and steep narrow stone stairways, as there was in this temple complex. It would be difficult to give anything like an intelligible description of its plan. In fact, there was no intelligible plan; each little wing seemed to have been built just where there happened to be the most room to spare at the moment. We were taken through a gateway, up a steep acclivity paved with flat stones and shut in between high walls. We turned sharply round a corner, and were swallowed up in a dark passage which led to a series of small courtyards. We climbed up a staircase, and obtained a glimpse of the interior of a temple, the gilded idols being only just perceptible in the dim religious light. We stepped out upon a terrace, and were amazed at the glorious view which burst upon our sight; and when we glanced behind us we were once more amazed that the temple-town had not been long ago crushed flat by a fall of the cliff, which overhung it so threateningly at the back. Then we were led up another staircase, along other passages, through other pokey cupboard-like apartments, until we got perfectly bewildered. It was like wandering through a maze or an enchanted cave. I could find my way about in Government House, Calcutta, much more easily than here, although there I was some little time learning the "geography" of the place; though when I came to the big oil-portrait of Feth Ali Shah I knew I was on the right way to my own room. But here in Himis I would defy anybody to find the way except the monks and friars who belonged to it.

The first apartment into which I was taken had a ceiling supported by picturesque wooden columns, and contained the idol Dollma, with big glowering eyes. In front of the image, which was said to be three hundred years old, were ranged row upon row of little brass bowls containing water, rice, corn, flour, lard and butter. I made a hurried sketch of it from the other side of the apartment (see p. 619). This was said to be the most revered idol in the monastery. Two lamas lay prostrate before the image of the Doggtsang Raspa, which was gilded and draped with a cloak. On the right of it was Lama Yalsras, and on the left Sanjas Shaggja Toba. The temples themselves, of which there were seven, were called *dengkang* (in Mongolian *doggung*), and the rooms where the monks read their *noms* (sacred books) were called *tsokkang* (in Mongolian *sumeh*).

The Kitchen at Himis.

The monks keep a little lamp burning perpetually in a huge goblet-shaped brass bowl filled with yellow fat, which they call *lochott*. The walls were hung with religious paintings in the shape of standards, often several, one above another; while from the roof were suspended a number of draperies called *chuchepp*. Long triple-pointed pennons called *pann* wreathed the columns, and baldachins, shaped like gigantic parasols, were fixed above the images of the gods. Drums, bells, cymbals, and long wooden trumpets also formed part of the equipment of the temple. It was like walking through a museum, one that I would gladly have carried away with me. The book-shelves

In the Valley of Sheyok.

groaned under the volumes of noms, or Buddhist scriptures. All the other temples were furnished in a similar way with images of the gods and *chortens* of silver, set with rubies, turquoises and gold. Through a trap-door in the floor I was shown the *bakkang;* that is to say, the "armoury" of the temple, where the monks kept their vestments, masks, hats, spears, drums, trumpets, sackbuts, and a thousand other things, which they use at the great religious dances that take place every year in July. Two or three of the lamas good-naturedly put on their festal attire, and sat, or rather stood, as models to me whilst I sketched them. The kitchen, or *tabbtsang*, which they used on the occasion of their great summer festival, con-

tained five gigantic cooking-pots, or "coppers," and several smaller ones, set in brick-work over a huge fireplace. The prior showed me everything himself, and did it with impressive dignity; and wound up by conducting me to a guest-room in a small and comfortable pavilion just below the monastery. When I visited him in the evening in his own apartment, the

A Flute-player at Sheyok.

narrow passages and corridors, seen in the yellow-red flare of the torches, were wonderfully like grottoes and caverns in a lime-stone mountain.

The old man told me that Himi-gompa, the name he gave to his monastery, was built three hundred years ago by Doggtsang Raspa, a lama who lives perpetually like the Dalai Lama. The present Doggtsang Raspa was, he said, nineteen years old, and for three years he had been living the life of a hermit, absolutely and entirely alone, in a very small gompa or cave in the mountain-side in the district called Gotsang. He had still three years to spend there. Thus for six whole years he would

never see the face of a human being and never take a step outside of his prison. A serving lama, who lived close by, would keep him supplied with food, pushing it in to him every day through a small aperture, while a spring of water in his cell furnished him with water. But the two men were not allowed to look at one another, nor were they ever allowed to speak. Should it be necessary to make any communication of importance to the Doggtsang Raspa, it would be written on a strip of paper and left in the aperture.

The enforced recluse spent his time in meditation and in studying the holy scriptures of his faith. I asked what would

The Pass of Kitchik-kumdan near Kara-korum.

happen to him if he fell ill, and was told, by way of answer, that he was so holy he never did fall ill ; and if he had done so, he possessed a remedy that was effectual against all the sicknesses in the world. Every Doggtsang Raspa before him had gone through the same process of purification. At the end of the six years he would come down to Himis, and when he died, his spirit would pass into a new Doggtsang Raspa.

There were about three hundred lamas attached to the monastery, and most of them spent the winter at other *gompas* or monasteries, and at Leh. They were, however, all supported by the monastery of Himis, which is rich and possesses a large extent of cultivated ground. A few years ago a Russian traveller

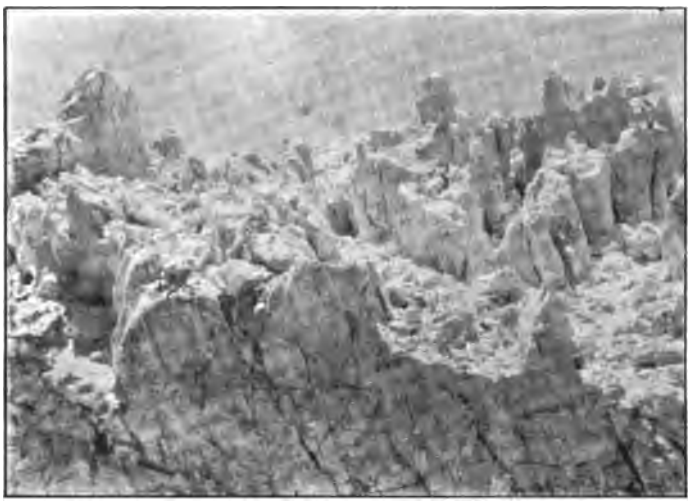
astonished the world by the pretended "discovery at Himis of a manuscript describing the life of Jesus." But as he has already been sufficiently exposed, I need not say anything further about him. The following afternoon, when I left the temple, the prior made me a present of various stores, and a sheep, for which he would not allow me to pay him. He himself accompanied us on horseback as far as the bridge across the Indus; and at Taggar we picked up the caravan.

The return journey through Asia and Europe would supply sufficient material for another long chapter of travel; but I must here break off my narrative, though there are just a few things which I ought to mention. Having ascended the valley of Sheyok, or Sheok, with yaks, we came to the pass of Karakorum (18,564 feet); thence we crossed the passes of Sughett-davan and Sanju with horses, rested a couple of days at Kargalik and Yarkand, and at length reached Kashgar on the 14th May, 1902. Spring was dight in all her beauties when I again sat with my old friend Consul-General Petrovsky in his well-remembered garden, and talked over my experiences in Central Asia, and thanked him for the incalculable services he had rendered me on so many occasions during the past years. Mr. Macartney and Father Hendricks were also both intensely interested in my story. At the same time I made the acquaintance of two newly-arrived Swedish missionaries, Messrs. Andersson and Bäcklund, who had thrown themselves zealously into the work of the mission, and had every reason to be satisfied with the fruits of their laborious and self-denying efforts.

But I had no time to linger. A clasp of the hand, and I must hasten westwards over the mountains. Kutchuk and Khodai Kullu returned to their huts in the Lop country, carrying with them a handsome recompense for their faithful service. At Osh I parted from honest old Turdu Bai, warmly recommending him to Colonel Saitseff, in whose hospitable house I was once more received with open arms. It was hard to part from Malenki and Malchik. I went into the yard to say good-bye to them before driving down to the railway station in Andijan, and their wondering, questioning eyes followed me as if they understood that we should never see one another again. At Chernyayeva I took heartfelt farewell of that fine fellow Chernoff, who was to travel *vid* Tashkend to Vernoye. Cherdon and the Lama accompanied me across the Caspian Sea. The good-natured Shereb Lama was taken terribly aback when he saw the paddle-

wheels of the big steamboat begin to carry us out towards the open sea. These two accompanied me as far as Petrovsk, whence they were to continue to Astrakhan. In that city the Lama intended to settle down in a Kalmuck monastery, Consul Petrovsky having joined with me in recommending him to the governor. Shereb Lama durst not show himself again in Kara-shahr, and Kamba Bombo had forbidden him once and for all ever to enter Lassa again. Cherdon was to take the Siberian railway to his home in Transbaikalia.

I found it very hard to part from them all. We had been together such a long time. The tears they shed bore witness



A Portion of the Glacier of Kitchik-kumdan.

also to the feelings with which they parted from me. I have heard from some of them since, and was especially glad to know that Shagdur had got at least as far as Osh, within the boundaries of the Russian Empire. General Sakharoff, of St. Petersburg, has several times very kindly given me information about my faithful Cossacks, and quite recently I received a letter from Colonel Saitseff, which I was unable to read without emotion. It contained a description of Shagdur's account of his impressions of the journey, especially of the dash for Lassa and the trip to India. I was very pleased to learn that he retained an affectionate recollection of me.

King Oscar honoured all four Cossacks with a gold medal

each, which he had specially struck for the purpose, and which they received the Czar's permission to wear. Their own Sovereign, the Czar, bestowed upon them the distinction of the Order of St. Anna, together with a present of 250 roubles (£26) each. The King of Sweden also sent gold medals to Turdu Bai and Khalmet Aksakal, and a silver medal to Faisullah. At an audience which His Majesty the Czar Nicholas II. graciously accorded me at Peterhof, he expressed the great satisfaction it had been to him to hear how pleased I was with his Cossacks, and that their conduct from the first day to the last had been so irreproachable. I sent an official report about them to General Kuropatkin, the Imperial Minister of War.

I will not attempt to describe the feelings which swept over me when, on the 27th June, 1902, the *Von Döbeln* steered in amongst the islands of the Swedish skärgård. How often and often I had wondered whether I should ever again see those dear old grey rocks, associated as they were with so many happy memories of my childhood! It was three years and three days, and far more than 1,001 nights, since I said good-bye to my father and mother and other members of the family. There they were, waiting for me on the same quay from which they had waved to me their farewells. Summer was come again in all its beauty, and the lilacs were once more in bloom as they were when I started. The long years which had passed in the interval seemed like a dream; it was as if I had only been away for a few short days. Everything was exactly as it used to be.

The very next day I was received in audience by King Oscar, who has always supported my plans with such munificent generosity, and I may even say with fatherly kindness. To him I related the story of my travels, adding yet another stone to the building which I hope is still far from being finished.

THE END.

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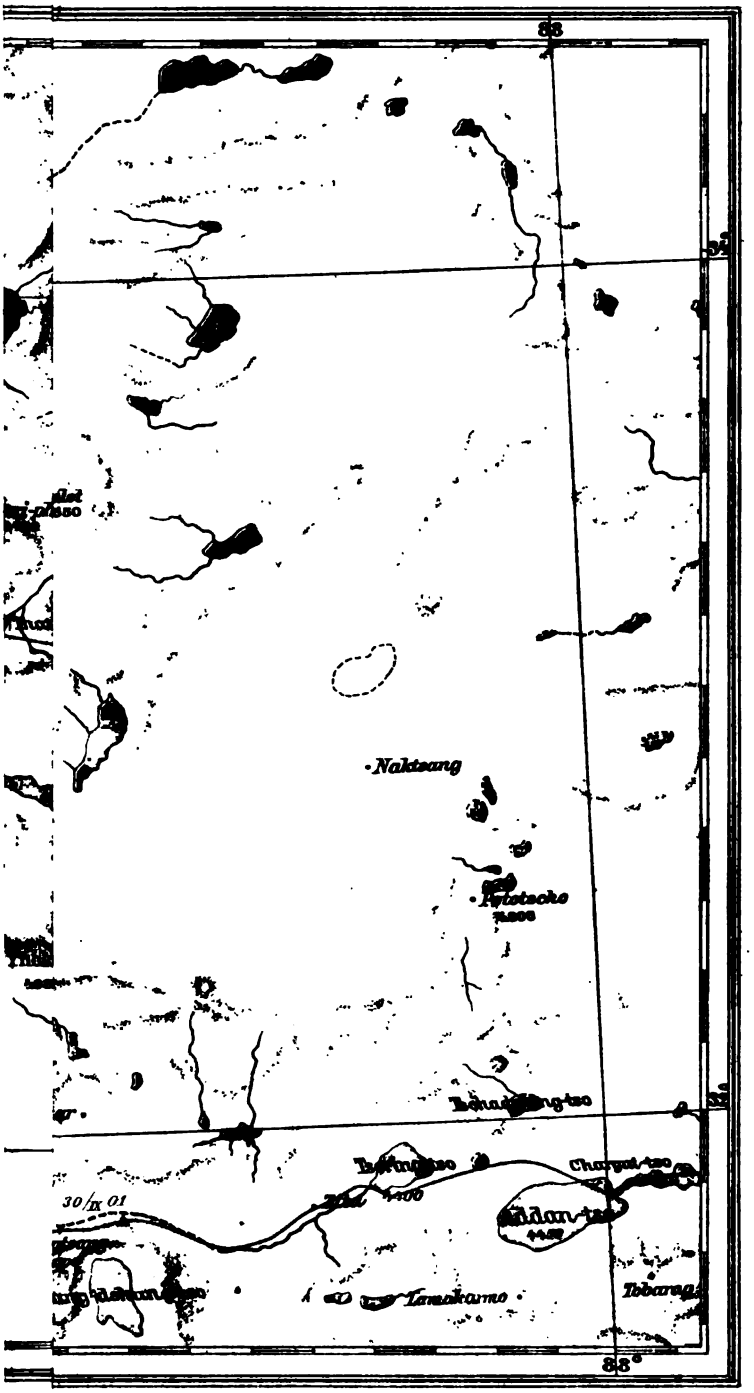

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